Write the Short Short

By MAREN ELWOOD

author of

"Characters Make Your Story"

The most complete and valuable guide to the successful writing and selling of short short stories--by one of the leading teachers of writing in the country.

WRITE *the* SHORT SHORT

By MAREN ELWOOD

In WRITE THE SHORT SHORT, Maren Elwood has analyzed every phase of the short short story, covering the entire field clearly and comprehensively. Miss Elwood, who is well-known for the excellence of her previous book on writing, CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY, disproves the unsound beliefs that have been repeated again and again about short short stories and replaces them with scientific facts. These facts she arrives at by breaking down into their component parts 175 published short short stories and showing what made them sell. When a writer has followed her classification and analysis of these stories, he will see clearly that once the fallacies he may have long entertained are disproved, he has a sound basis of technical knowledge from which to proceed.

Beyond making these analyses and offering a guide for the writer to make similar studies himself, Miss Elwood tells how to plan, how to write, and how to market short short fiction. She covers such important topics as characterization, the plotted short short, the off-pattern short short, structure, format, viewpoints, transitions, style, physical make-up of the short short, timeliness and taboos, emotion in the short short, one hundred and one basic ideas for short shorts.

WRITE THE SHORT SHORT is a thorough text, easy to read and well illustrated from published stories. From the first chapter exploding frequently quoted theories about the short short to the last chapter on counsel to the writer, WRITE THE SHORT SHORT contains down-to-earth instruction by an outstanding teacher, making it an intelligent and direct guide towards success in writing and selling short short stories.

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Write the
Short Short

Write the Short Short

by

MAREN ELWOOD

Author of *Characters Make Your Story*

Boston

THE WRITER, INC.

Publishers

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REPRINTED 1967

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To all my Students
old and new
whose faith has made it possible
for me
to do this book

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My sincere thanks to the following authors for their kind permission to reprint their stories and thereby make this book all the more valuable to the serious reader: Ben Hur Lampman for *Buttonholes* and *The Girl at the Filling Station,* Hugh Cave for *Women Must Wait,* Lloyd Eric Reeve for *Caged,* Walter C. Brown for *The Puzzle-Knot,* Dale Clark for *The Policeman and the Pirate,* Michael Foster for *Later,* John Reid Byers for *Found Money,* William Cole for *New Home,* Frank Richardson Pierce for *Sucker Trick,* Louis Kamp for *A Lover for Sara.*

And my sincerest appreciation and thanks to John Howard for his preparation of the indexes and his careful reading of the galleys. Certainly to do such tedious work so well is but added proof of his friendship.

Maren Elwood

Hollywood '47

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Part I

THE TRUTH ABOUT SHORT SHORTS

CHAPTER I

Don't You Believe It

THIS is an age in which facts, scientifically arrived at, are honored and respected. An age in which superstitions are in disrepute. Yet the amazing condition prevails of a widespread belief in a number of superstitions regarding the writing of the *short short*.

I call these beliefs superstitions because, to quote Webster's Dictionary, they are "contrary to scientific knowledge and . . . *maintained in spite of evidence to the contrary.*"

The young writer is not to be blamed for accepting these superstitions as scientific facts. They are stated and reiterated in books about writing, in articles printed in magazines for writers, in classrooms where the writing is taught. They are handed down from one "authority" to another as snakes' fangs, the bones of a mouse, and a cluster of owl's feathers are handed down from one medicine man to another. The young writer naturally accepts these superstitions as truths and is guided by them in planning and writing his short shorts. Then, when he fails to sell the results of his work, he blames himself, grows discouraged, and perhaps discontinues altogether his attempts to enter the short short field.

Or, because he accepts these superstitions as valid, he discards perfectly good short short material that these same "authorities" tell him he cannot develop into a salable short short.

Yet anyone of average intelligence can disprove these superstitions, replace them with scientific facts. *All he has to do is to train himself to break stories down into their basic elements:* in other words, to see what makes them "tick." By this means he can dis-

prove to his own satisfaction the fallacies that are so generally accepted regarding how short shorts must be written. He won't have to take the word of anyone else. *He will know for himself.* And that is the only thoroughly satisfactory knowledge there is—the kind we secure for ourselves.

The young writer can gain this knowledge by *analyzing* the short shorts published in any one month in half a dozen different magazines. A guide for making such analyses is included in this book and every chapter contains *suggestions* and *training*. Anyone with a reasonably analytical mind can use this guide and apply the training suggestions. You are analytical or you would not be reading this book. So take advantage of this guide in preparing yourself to write publishable short shorts.

Now let us examine these superstitious beliefs that so seriously hamper the inexperienced writer who hopes to write and sell short shorts:

1. *That short shorts are harder to write than any other form of fiction.*

This superstition often frightens the beginning writer and thus partially or completely paralyzes his creative faculty. Ignore it. It isn't so.

2. *That a short short MUST have a plot, with ALL the plot elements necessary for a long short.*

This superstition often causes the young writer to discard perfectly good short short material on the one hand, or to over-burden his short short with plot complications on the other.

3. *That a short short can be told only from the first-person viewpoint or the third-person viewpoint: that the writer cannot change viewpoints in a short short.*

This is one of the most amazing superstitions of the lot. It causes the writer to bungle the presentation of what might otherwise have been a salable short short.

4. *That the writer MUST begin a short short with action, or dialogue, or both.*

This superstition is responsible for the labored giving of information and characterization later in the story, and so rendering a story unsalable.

5. *That a short short MUST have a surprise at the end.*

If this were a fact, instead of the utterly unfounded superstition that it is, many of the finest, most moving published short shorts would never have seen print.

6. *That a short short MUST have a time lapse of less than one hour and take place in one setting.*

This superstition is disproved so often by published short shorts that how anyone can believe it is amazing.

7. *That a short short MUST NEVER use the device of a true flashback.*

Short shorts using the true flashback are found in the best magazines. If this superstition were true, such excellent short short material could not be used.

8. *That a short short MUST contain strongly dramatic action.*

This superstition is not believed by professional writers nor by editors who buy short shorts. Many published short shorts contain almost no dramatic action and are excellent stories.

9. *That a short short MUST have an important idea or theme.*

Facts refute this superstition. About twenty per cent of short shorts published in the top smooth-paper, general-interest magazines are light, humorous or semi-humorous, and have no important idea or theme.

Not one of the above listed is an odd, unusual or rare superstition. If such were true, it would not be worth while refuting them. It is only because they are commonly put forward that I feel it is time someone showed them up for what they are: *fallacies that*

should no longer be allowed to hamper and mislead the earnest, ambitious writer.

Method of Study

What are the nine "don't-you-believe-its" given in this chapter? Learn them so thoroughly you can write them down, not necessarily in the order in which they are given, without referring to the text.

CHAPTER II

Believe It or Not

BECAUSE every month so many published short shorts disprove the often repeated "superstitions" listed in the preceding chapter, let us examine these "superstitions" separately:

1. *That short shorts are harder to write than any other form of fiction.*

The proof that this is not true is two-fold. First, there is the testimony of professional writers of short shorts, most of whom say that it takes less time and energy to *plan* and *write* a short short than a long short, provided of course that the fundamental principles of writing short shorts have been mastered. Second, there is the testimony of common sense and reason. Most short shorts have *fewer characters* and *simpler* characterization, *fewer settings* and *scenes, fewer obstacles* and *complications* than a long short. They all have less words, many fewer words, than a long short. Therefore, the trained writer who can write publishable long shorts will, in practically all cases, plan and write a short short in far less time than it takes him to write a long short.

2. *That a short short MUST have a plot, with ALL the plot elements necessary for a long short.*

If this were true, no incident, or situation, or condition that depends for emotional value on simple interest could ever be presented as a short short. Yet incidents, situations and conditions are often the sole framework of published short shorts.

To cite one example of an "incident" short short:

> Two young men, one an American, the other a Russian soldier, meet in a Russian city restaurant. The American has plenty of cigarettes, the Russian none. The Russian has an especially fine pair of warm gloves. The American needs such a pair, but cannot find them in the shops. The American slips his packet of cigarettes into the young Russian's pocket. After the young Russian has gone the American finds the Russian's fine gloves in his own pocket.[1]

Obviously, this story does not have a plot in the generally accepted meaning of the word. *It is an incident.* But through good planning, excellent characterization, progressive action, and a surprise ending, the incident became a short short and was published in one of the top smooth-paper magazines.

Naturally such "incident" material is capable of innumerable variations.

Next an example of an "interesting situation" short short:

> A seven-year-old boy is being questioned in court to determine whether or not his mother is a good parent. The boy's answers reveal that the boy thinks his governess is his real mother, because she is kind and loves him devotedly. He thinks that his mother, who is selfish, unkind and mercenary, is only pretending she is his mother in order to get large sums of money from his father.[2]

There is no surprise ending. The interest of the story lies in the *unusual situation.*

Or to examine an "emotional situation" short short:

> A man, who has been in prison for ten years and has just been released, goes into a pet shop, buys a pair of doves in a cage, pays for them with the five dollars given him by the state when he left the prison, takes the birds into the street and releases them.[3]

[1] A PAIR OF GLOVES by William Cole. *Collier's,* April 18, 1942.
[2] GOOD PARENT by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan. *Collier's,* June 19, 1937.
[3] CAGED by Lloyd Eric Reeve. *Household Magazine,* August 1935. See Appendix.

This, also, is an incident, since there is no obstacle and no conflict. There is no surprise ending. Yet the interest in the story is held by the *intrinsically interesting situation,* characterization, and the strong emotion of sympathy for the main character.

3. *That a short short can be told only from the first-person viewpoint or the third-person viewpoint: that the writer cannot change viewpoints in a short short.*

It is remarkable that anyone with even a slight knowledge of the technique of writing should seriously make such a statement as this, when the most casual survey will show that approximately fifty per cent of the short shorts published are written from the omniscient viewpoint, and that a few even use viewpoints that shift from the mind of one character to another. Neither is it at all unusual to find a published short short told from the objective viewpoint. What viewpoints are and how to use them will be discussed in Chapter XI. Examples of the different viewpoints of published stories will be found in the Appendix to this book.

An example of a short short that changes viewpoints three times:

> Tells the story of Lee Brand, Hollywood producer, and his cynical friend, Wesley Granger; of the "good guy," Lee Brand, who started out to be a chisler, but found he was too kind-hearted to finish what he had started; of Brand's wife who discovers to her joy that her husband is not the rat she suspected for a time that he might be.[4]

4. *That the writer MUST begin a short short with action, or dialogue, or both.*

Many short shorts begin with information and characterization in narrative form, sometimes from the omniscient viewpoint, sometimes from the main character third-person viewpoint, sometimes from the objective viewpoint. Of course to hold reader interest with an opening of this type the writer must *know how to write interesting dramatic narrative,* but that knowledge is part of any professional writer's equipment—*or must be made so.*

There is nothing mysterious or especially difficult about mastering

[4] GOOD GUY by Francis Cockrell. *Collier's,* May 25, 1940.

the technique of presentation. But it is a matter of *understanding* tempo, story pace, the use of vivid words that build pictures, word arrangement, emotional appeal, etc. And then *using* them.

5. *That a short short MUST have a surprise at the end.*

A little less than one-half of the short shorts published have surprise endings. So let the writer for whom a surprise ending is difficult, if not impossible, take heart. For instance, neither of the short shorts previously summarized in this chapter, GOOD PARENT and CAGED, have surprise endings.

To examine yet another short short not having a surprise ending:

> A man is approaching a doctor's laboratory that is in a wing of his home. As the man enters, the branch of a climbing rose swings out and a thorn scratches his cheek. The reader learns that the man is married to the doctor's former wife and that he won her away from the doctor by underhanded means. The man has come to gloat over the doctor. This he does ruthlessly. During the conversation it is revealed that he is on his way to a remote place in the Canadian woods where he is to fish for several days, alone. The two men talk of the deadly virus the doctor has developed. Once injected, nothing can stop its progressive action and death results quickly. The man becomes more and more abusive. Finally, the doctor says something must be done for that scratch on the man's cheek. The Doctor does it and covers the scratch with gauze. They say goodbye. The man, whom we too dislike, walks away—to what the reader knows will be certain death a few days later, from the virus culture on the gauze.[5]

There is no surprise, because the reader has seen what the doctor did. The reader knows all the implications and what the consequences of the act will be.

Though no last-minute surprise is necessary, it *is* necessary that every short short have a *significant* last paragraph, or last line, but this is a matter of presentation and *not necessarily* of action.

[5] A DATE FOR THURSDAY by John August. *Collier's*, June 12, 1937.

6. *That a short short MUST have a time lapse of less than one hour and take place in one setting.*

A large number of short shorts do have a time lapse of one hour or less, but many cover far longer time lapses than that. Therefore, a long time lapse does not necessarily bar material from being presented in the form of a short short. Always the important point to bear in mind is not that of time lapse, but that of *unity of situation.*

It is true that the beginning writer is inclined to allow *unnecessary* time lapses to occur in his stories, whatever their length. Of course, in any story an *unnecessary* time lapse is absolutely taboo. Let it ever be borne in mind that *the shorter the time lapse* and the fewer the number of scene shifts, the faster the tempo, and the easier it is to achieve *compactness* and *unity.* Nevertheless, with *proper handling,* it is possible to use long time lapses even in a short short without sacrificing either fast tempo or unity. To be sure greater skill is required, other things being equal, in handling a long time lapse than a short time elapse. *Smooth transitions are necessary* and the story with the long time lapse usually makes use of a larger percentage of narration and a smaller percentage of dialogue, though this is by no means always the case. Each story dictates its own treatment and there are no set percentages of anything.

Here is an example of a short short with a long time lapse. This story is approximately fifteen hundred words long, almost entirely narration, and covers a time lapse of about a year.

> A young backwoodsman finds nearly a thousand dollars in a jar buried under a mountain cedar. He knows it is money taken in a recent robbery of a bank in a near-by town. He has no intention of returning his find, but he knows he can't spend it because everyone in the community knows he has no money and that he is too shiftless to work. He reasons, however, that if he finds a job and works for a year, then he can make use of this found money and no one will suspect where it came from. He thinks of a girl he has tried to court, but who told him he was too shiftless. He knows her father would run him off the place if he came courting her.
>
> After he has been working a few months, saving his money, the girl tells him he can come to see her now. In a few months they are married. They live in a "company house" belonging to the saw mill where he works. They have real furniture that the young hus-

band had bought with his earnings. He figures he can begin to spend the found money soon. But one day he hears that the men who robbed the bank have escaped from jail. He knows they will return and dig up the money from where it is buried under the cedar tree. Taking his gun, the young man goes to get the money. But on the way he realizes he doesn't need the money; he has his woman, his home, his job. In fact he never needed that money, and it might have made trouble for him.[6]

The viewpoint then shifts to Sheriff Tucker.

In his search he has failed to find the escaped criminals. Then down the road, coming toward him, he sees the young man herding the escaped criminals ahead at the point of his gun. They had tried to buy the young man off, but now he is on the side of law and order. The sheriff then tells the young man there is a reward of five hundred dollars offered for the capture of each of the criminals. This will be his, since undeniably it was he who captured the criminals.

7. *That a short short MUST NEVER use the device of a true flashback.*

Out of every six short shorts you are almost certain to find at least one that makes use of one or more flashbacks giving information to the reader of what happened *before* the story opened. Usually these are short, not more than a paragraph or two, but sometimes the flashback constitutes the greater part of the story. Especially is this true of character stories that are DECISION or PURPOSE ABANDONMENT stories.

Study carefully the example of a short short using a flashback in the Appendix to this book.

8. *That a short short MUST contain strongly dramatic action.*

Many short shorts present nothing more than an interesting situation, belief, standard of conduct or of ethics, or an unusual character trait or an ordinary character trait expressing itself in an unusual way. Many contain almost no action, either physical or mental, that truly could be called dramatic.

Here is a good example of a short short having little dramatic action:

[6] FOUND MONEY by John Reid Byers. *Collier's*, June 1, 1940. See Appendix.

A *matter-of-fact* young wife has an extremely imaginative and *whimsical* husband. She tells him to make a list of groceries he is to get . . . eggs, vegetables, milk, and so on. He writes, "one package of marijuana cigarettes, two underground tickets for Mexico, fifty pounds of uranium. . . ." After other zany actions, he leaves. A very matter-of-fact neighbor comes in, a man who believes in nothing except what he can see, including the atom bomb, because, he insists, no one ever saw an atom. He drives the young woman all but distracted with his curious attitude of mind, so narrow and dull. When her husband returns she fully appreciates his whimsicality and, to prove it, tells him that she has a lover. She is going to run away with this wonder man in a McCormick International Disintegrator . . . The story ends with them in each other's arms.[7]

9. *That a short short MUST have an important idea, or theme.*

Many short shorts are light, semi-humorous, their only purpose being to give the reader entertainment and relaxation. This type of story often has a trick, or surprise ending.

An example of an intrinsically "light" short short:

A young man, occupation ink-matcher, bumps into a young lady as he enters an elevator. He is too shy to take a good look at her, but smells the unusual perfume she wears and finds it fascinating, unforgettable. He thinks about her so much he makes mistakes and loses his job. Looking for another, he finds that a job in his usual occupation is hard to find. One day, broke and desperate, he walks into the office of a big printing concern, and up to the desk of the pretty receptionist and secretary. Suddenly he smells again the wonderful perfume. But now he's angry. He tells the girl it's all her fault that he lost his job; she has to get him another. After some forceful persuading, she tries to get the manager to see the young man. This angers the manager and he fires the girl. Then, relenting, the manager calls the young man into his office, hires him and rehires the girl. The girl and the young man know they will see more of each other. When the girl is alone she smells the perfume on her handkerchief. She is glad the young man likes it. It was lucky the blond perfume sales-girl who dropped into the office that morn-

[7] A LOVER FOR SARA by Louis Kamp. *Cosmopolitan,* August 1946. See Appendix.

ing had dabbed some on her handkerchief. Funny the young man thought he had seen her before.[8]

Certainly there is no theme or emotionally important idea back of this short short. It is nothing more than a gay little story of *complication.* Yet the story sold in a top market.

The fact is that almost any story idea, however slight or however strong, may be presented in the short short form, *provided the writer has learned the requirements of the medium.*

One of the very pleasantest "believe-it-or-nots" about writing the short short story is that *the demand exceeds the supply* and the pay is excellent. Here where the competition is less keen, the unknown beginner is on the same footing as the established writer—*provided* he can write a good story.

The truth is, there are not enough good short shorts being written to fill the growing demand for this form of fiction. Consequently, editors are forced to publish short shorts that are below the standard set for long shorts for that particular magazine.

There are two reasons for the scarcity of good short shorts. The first is that many writers, even professional writers, are afraid to write them because of the prevalent mistaken idea that they are more difficult to write than long shorts. The second, that writers *do not know how* to get short short ideas or how to develop a story idea into a publishable short short.

It is to be hoped that when you have finished reading this book you will no longer be afraid to write short shorts, that you will know how to get short short ideas and be able to develop them into acceptable short shorts.

Method of Study

Start a folder of published short shorts that illustrate these "believe-it-or-nots," with the exception of No. 1.

On the outside of this folder write the name of each story you include, followed by the "don't-you-believe-it" that the story disproves.

Analyze these short shorts carefully according to the subdivisions in this chapter.

[8] SHY YOUNG MAN by L. L. Foreman. *Collier's,* July 26, 1941.

CHAPTER III

Tabulated Survey of 175 Published Short Shorts

THERE are many questions that a writer must decide *before* he starts to write a short short. Often he decides many of these questions automatically, without conscious thought. The answers *appear to him* to be inherent in the story idea as it first comes to him. Perhaps this story idea concerns an old woman. She is marooned by rising flood waters on a small sandy island in a great river. The story action has to do with how the old woman, by using her ingenuity, gets safely away from the island just as the water sweeps over it. For some vague reason, or no reason at all, the writer decides to use the flashback format.

The beginning writer almost never stops to consider whether or not flashback ingenuity stories about old women, are looked on with much or little favor by the editor of the magazine to which he hopes to sell his story. Yet this is an angle of the *utmost importance,* since on it, to a large extent, depends his chances for selling that particular story, told in that *particular way.*

If the market he had in mind was the smooth-paper general-interest magazines, and he had made a survey of one hundred or more short shorts published in those magazines, he would have changed his main character to an old man and thus, all other things being equal, given himself approximately ten times more chance of selling his story than if he had kept the old woman in the major role. Neither, in all probability, would he have used the flashback format, nor the plot

pattern of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by means of INGENUITY. He would have been much more likely to tell the story almost or entirely chronologically, instead of in the true flashback format, and made it a build-up of admiration and pity, with the old man losing his life at the end in a successful effort to save the life of a child, or young person.

How do we know all of this?

Because an *adequate survey,* properly tabulated, of short shorts in the field where you hope to sell, will pay off in dollars and cents. The writer who has such a survey at hand *won't waste time* writing stories *that the survey clearly shows* he has little or no chance of selling; unless, of course, his story has several features so outstanding, so fresh, so original and appealing, that they outweigh the characteristics that the editors in this field dislike, or care little for. *A good survey shows you how to slant your stories* to markets where, if well written, they will be welcome.

For example, in *the smooth-paper, general-circulation magazines,* the main character in a large majority of the short shorts is a male, and the largest number of these male characters are married, between the ages of twenty-six and fifty. On the other hand, the short shorts in *the regional, home, farm, and women's magazines,* have far more women and girls than men in the major roles.

The above *facts,* and many others equally important and valuable to the writer appear when a survey is made. *No longer is the writer dependent on guess-work,* or "feeling" or intuition—all most unreliable guides when making the all-important decisions as to what to write and how, for a specific publication or a well-defined group of magazines.

The tabulated survey of the general smooth-paper, literary and secondary women's magazines that follows will be helpful to almost any writer of short shorts. You are urged to study it carefully.

TABULATED SURVEY OF 175 PUBLISHED SHORT SHORTS

I One Hundred Short Shorts Published in General-Interest, Smooth-Paper Nationally Distributed Magazines

1. FORMAT		
Chronological	88	
Flashback	12	100
2. LENGTH		
Under one thousand words	24	
1000 to 1200 words	67	
1200 to 2000 words	9	100
3. MAIN CHARACTERS		
Male		
Small boy	7	
Adolescent boy	3	
Young man, unmarried	23	
Married or mature man	34	
Old man	10	
	77	
Female		
Small girl	1	
Adolescent girl	2	
Young girl, unmarried (Age 18-25)	10	
Mature woman	8	
Old woman	2	
	23	100

4. NUMBER OF CHARACTERS
(Only characters appearing in person and named are counted)

Two characters	29	
Three characters	43	
Four characters	16	
Five characters	12	100

5. NATIONALITIES OF MAIN CHARACTERS

American characters	88	
Englishman	2	
German	2	
Frenchman	1	
Filipino man	1	
Japanese (adolescent American-born boy)	1	
Negro	1	
Norwegian boy	1	
Russian man	1	
Chinese woman	1	
English girl	1	100

6. CRIMINALS
Of the one hundred stories examined, thirteen had to do with criminals. Of these, thirteen featured criminals in important roles and seven presented criminals in secondary roles.

7. DIALOGUE, PROPORTION OF

Over 50% dialogue	43	
Under 50% dialogue	51	
No dialogue	4	
All dialogue	2	100

8. PROBLEMS OR SUBJECTS		
Young love	23	
Mature love and marriage problems	24	
Psychological states, unusual beliefs	24	
Miscellaneous	29	100
9. PLANS USED		
Cinderella plan	9	
Discovery and reversal	12	
Significant incident or situation	37	
	58	
10. PLOTS USED		
Purpose accomplishment, by any means	22	
Purpose abandonment	12	
Biter-Bit	6	
Decision	2	
	42	100
11. TIME LAPSE		
Less than one hour	46	
More than an hour, less than a day	25	
More than a day, less than a week	11	
More than a week, less than a month	10	
More than one month	8	100
12. VIEWPOINTS		
Omniscient	52	
Main character, third person	31	
First person, minor character narrator	8	
Objective	5	
First person, main character	4	100

13. TYPES (The following categories overlap in some instances)		
Strongly emotional, little dramatic action	36	
Strong dramatic action	34	
Illustrating a psychological twist, unusual belief, or surprising standard of conduct or ethics	24	
Light, semi-humorous	20	
Build-up of emotion toward main character	18	
Revelation of surprising condition, not included in above categories	11	
Ironical	5	
Satire	1	
14. TITLES—NUMBER OF WORDS		
One word	9	
Two words	36	
Three words	27	
Four words	19	
Five words	6	
Six words	2	
Seven words	1	100
15. ENDINGS		
Surprise endings	53	
No surprise ending. Known condition or action summed up for the reader	47	100

II. Twenty-five Short Shorts under Eight Hundred Words in Length—Vignette Type Published in General-Interest, Smooth-Paper Nationally Distributed Magazines

1. FORMAT		
Chronological	24	
Flashback	1	25

2. LENGTH		
300 to 600 words	17 (vignette)	
600 to 800 words	8	25
3. MAIN CHARACTERS		
Male		
Small boy	2	
Adolescent boy	2	
Young man	7	
Mature man	12	
Old man	1	
	24	
Female		
Young woman	1	25
4. NUMBER OF CHARACTERS		
Two characters	12	
Three characters	8	
Four characters	4	
Five characters	1	25
5. NATIONALITIES OF MAIN CHARACTERS		
American	20	
English	2	
French	2	
Norwegian	1	25
6. CRIMINALS		
Main role	4	
Minor role	3	
7. DIALOGUE, PROPORTION OF		
Over 50% dialogue	14	
Under 50% dialogue	8	
No dialogue	3	
All dialogue	0	25

8. PROBLEMS OR SUBJECTS		
Young love	3	
Mature love, marriage	5	
Miscellaneous	17	25
9. PLANS USED		
Cinderella	0	
Discovery and reversal	7	
Significant incident	11	
	18	
10. PLOTS USED		
Purpose accomplishment	3	
Purpose abandonment	1	
Biter-Bit	3	
Decision	0	25
11. TIME LAPSE		
Less than one hour	17	
More than an hour, less than a day	4	
More than a day, less than a week	3	
More than a week, less than a month	0	
More than one month	1	25
12. VIEWPOINTS		
Omniscient	8	
Main character, third person	7	
First person, minor character narrator	2	
Objective	2	
First person, main character	6	25
13. TYPES (The following categories overlap in some cases)		
Light, semi-humorous	6	
Strong dramatic action	14	
Strongly emotional	8	
Psychological	0	
Ironical	0	
Satirical	0	
Build-up of emotion	4	
Trick surprise ending	6	

14. TITLES—NUMBER OF WORDS

One word	6	
Two words	15	
Three words	3	
Four words	1	25

15. ENDINGS

Surprise endings	19	
No surprise endings	6	25

III. Twenty-five Short Shorts Published in Literary Magazines

1. FORMAT

Chronological	22	
Flashback	3	25

2. LENGTH

800 to 1000 words	5	
1000 to 1500 words	16	
1500 to 1800 words	4	25

3. MAIN CHARACTERS

Male		
Young boy	3	
Young man	5	
Mature man	7	
Old man	2	
A mouse	1	
A monkey	1	
	19	
Female		
Young girl	1	
Young woman	1	
Mature woman	2	
Saint in heaven	1	
Wax dummy	1	
	6	25

4. NUMBER OF CHARACTERS			
Two characters	5		
Three characters	5		
Four characters	9		
Five characters	3		
Six characters	3		25
5. NATIONALITIES OF MAIN CHARACTERS			
American	7	(Twelve of	
French	5	these stories	
Not actual people, hence no nationality	4	were in	
German	3	foreign	
English	2	settings.)	
Arab	1		
Hungarian	1		
Italian	1		
Russian	1		25
6. CRIMINALS			
Main role	1		
Minor role	1		
7. DIALOGUE, PROPORTION OF			
Over 50% dialogue	8		
Under 50% dialogue	11		
All dialogue	1		
No dialogue	5		25
8. PROBLEMS OR SUBJECTS (The following categories overlap in some instances)			
Young love	1		
Mature love, marriage problems	2		
Sociological	7		
Psychological	8		
Allegory, parable, phantasy	6		
Unimportant or no problem, or significance	8		
Important problem or subject	16		

9. PLANS USED		
Discovery and reversal	2	
Incident or situation	19	
	21	
10. PLOTS USED		
Purpose accomplishment	2	
Biter-Bit	2	
	4	25
11. TIME LAPSE		
Less than one hour	5	
More than an hour, less than a day	5	
More than a day, less than a month	4	
More than a month, less than a year	5	
More than one year to 25 years	6	25
12. VIEWPOINTS		
Omniscient	13	
Main character, third person	5	
First person, minor character narrator	4	
First person, main character	3	25
13. TITLES—NUMBER OF WORDS		
One word	2	
Two words	8	
Three words	9	
Four words	2	
Five words	4	25
14. ENDINGS		
Surprise	7	
No surprise	18	25

IV. Twenty-five Short Shorts Published in the Secondary Women's Magazines

1. FORMAT		
Chronological	23	
Flashback	1	
String-of-beads	1	25
2. LENGTH		
Approx. 1000 words	12	
1000 to 1200 words	9	
1200 to 1500 words	4	25
3. MAIN CHARACTERS		
Male		
Adolescent boy	4	
Mature man	2	
	6	
Female		
Young girl	2	
Young married woman	4	
Young unmarried woman	5	
Mature woman	4	
Old woman	4	25
4. NUMBER OF CHARACTERS		
Two characters	10	
Three characters	12	
Four characters	3	25

5. NATIONALITIES OF MAIN CHARACTERS

Only American characters were used in both major and minor roles. All stories were in American settings.

6. CRIMINALS

No criminals were featured in these stories, either in major or minor roles.

7. DIALOGUE, PROPORTION OF		
Over 50% dialogue	15	
Under 50% dialogue	6	
All dialogue	0	
No dialogue	4	25
8. PROBLEMS OR SUBJECTS		
Young love	5	
Family problems	6	
Character delineation	7	
Individual problems	7	25
9. PLANS USED		
Discovery and reversal	1	
Cinderella	3	
Build-up of emotion	3	
Presenting interesting and emotional situation	5	
	12	
10. PLOTS USED		
Purpose accomplishment	11	
Purpose abandonment	2	25
11. TIME LAPSE		
Less than one hour	12	
More than an hour, less than a day	4	
More than a day, less than a week	5	
More than a week, less than a month	0	
More than a month, less than a year	2	
More than one year	2	25
12. VIEWPOINTS		
Omniscient	8	
Main character, third person	11	
First person, minor character narrator	4	
Objective	0	
First person, main character	2	25

13. TITLES—NUMBER OF WORDS

One word	5	
Two words	6	
Three words	7	
Four words	4	
Five words	0	
Six words	2	
Seven words	1	25

14. TYPES (The following categories overlap in some instances.)

Light, semi-humorous	4	
Strong dramatic action	3	
Strongly emotional, little dramatic action	15	
Illustrating a psychological twist, unusual belief or surprising standard of conduct or ethics	2	
Ironical	0	
Satire	0	
Build-up of emotion toward the main character	5	
Revelation of a surprising condition not included in the above categories	7	

15. ENDINGS

Surprise endings	16	
No surprise endings	9	25

The survey you have just read and, I hope, weighed and analyzed, can be of incalculable value to you. But it *cannot take the place of a survey you make yourself*. Figures, statistics, conclusions, these are fine as far as they go. But *they are not* the whole story, especially when made by someone else.

Suppose you read one hundred or more short shorts gathered from the magazines of one group. You make your own survey and tabulate the findings. The tangible results are plain . . . you can see them

in the typewritten columns of figures, adding up to definite sums under the many headings. But what about the *intangibles* that are just as surely yours as the pages of your survey, neatly piled on the desk before you? A few of these intangibles are the overtones, the "feelings" of the many stories you have read, the philosophies of life they have expressed, what they have *not* said almost as much as what they *have* said, their tempo, the kind of people they have been written for, and so on.

These, and many more factors of which you will be subtly conscious, cannot be captured in rows of figures and tabulations of this and that. But *you will have their essence in your mind* and heart, and, because of that, you will write better stories, stories that editors will like, hardly conscious of how or why.

No one can do this for you. If it is done, you must do it for yourself. The rewards will be all out of proportion to the labor involved, and the knowledge you gain will be yours for the rest of your life.

Method of Study

1. Select the magazine-group for which you want to write. Read and analyze *at least* twenty-five short shorts published in this field, tabulating your findings by the method used in this chapter.

Part II

PLANNING THE SHORT SHORT

CHAPTER IV

Characters for Your Short Short

THE first requirement of fiction, whatever the form may be and whether it be long or short, is interesting characters. *Characters that give the illusion of being real people.* Never begin to write a story until the characters, who will act out that story, are so clear in your own mind, your own imagination, that you can "see" them, "hear" them talk, and *know how they will think and act* in any set of circumstances. Yet before this is possible, *you must know a great deal more about your characters than will actually appear in your story.* This is *part of your story planning.* For example, you will not, of course, give your reader a detailed description of your story character. But unless you know exactly how that character looks, what clothes he wears, how he walks, what his mannerisms are, and so on, you will be unable to *select the two or three significant details* that will enable the reader to visualize that character.[1] It is impossible to know too much about your story characters, *even the story characters in a short short.*

Many writers in planning their stories find it helpful to use someone they know or have known in the past as a model for each character, making enough changes so that the model will be unrecognizable in the fictional portrayal. In order to do this you may change one outstanding physical characteristic, or sex, or age; or you may assign to your fictional character a dominant character trait expressing itself

[1] See Chapters II and III of *Characters Make Your Story* by Maren Elwood, *Houghton Mifflin.*

in a completely different way—always provided, of course, that this change does not make an "inconsistent" character.

Other writers construct brief, though detailed, descriptions and biographies of imagined characters before they begin to write a story (see Chapters IV, V and VI of *Characters Make Your Story*). Give both methods a thorough trial, as you may find both work well for you. Or you may devise entirely different methods of creating story characters. It does not matter *how* you create your story characters. All that matters is that you fully create them *as individuals.*

Characterization in the short short necessarily must be simpler than in any other fiction form, because of the smallness of the canvas on which the writer, using words instead of pigments, has set out to paint his picture. In the short short there is no time for subtle or complicated characterization. With the exception of the main character in the DECISION short short, characters can show only one important character trait, and do nothing during the course of the story that contradicts or goes contrary to that character trait. Remember that because of the necessary brevity of your story, there is no time in a short short to reconcile conflicting character traits, or to follow more than one character trait through suitable action to its logical conclusion.

Part of the difficulty experienced by young writers in creating their fictional characters is due to a misunderstanding as to what character creation really is, and exactly how to go about it. Time spent now in clearing up this fundamental question will pay valuable dividends later on.

The successful writer does not create his story characters *for the reader.* He creates them *for himself.* Only the reader *on his part* can create story characters *for the reader.* Think this over carefully. The implications are far-reaching and incalculably important to you as a writer. The conscientious, intelligent writer makes sure that he knows his story characters through and through, and that they are *real to him,* not mere cardboard dummies. Until this is done it is not possible for the writer *to give the reader the few significant details* regarding these characters that will make it possible for the *reader on his part* to create these characters. Never forget this!

The writer can make no greater mistake than to think of his reader as passive. On the contrary, if he is enjoying his story, the reader's

imagination is intensely active *creating* story characters, scenes, action, the very story itself, from *significant details* given him by the writer. To be sure, these significant details must necessarily be few. Their number is restricted to the absolute minimum in the short short. Out of the many details known to the writer about his actors, *he selects only those that most clearly portray* character, or suggest specific character traits. From these details the reader, by the use of his own imaginative faculty that is conditioned by his own experiences, own character, memories and temperament, *creates for himself* the story characters.

It is the function of the writer to *start the reader's imagination working,* not to present to the reader a set of fully created characters, detailed descriptions of scenes, or meticulously delineated action. But, and this is the point to be emphasized, the writer cannot help the reader to imagine characters, scenes and action that he himself has not fully created in his own imagination. Many stories having intrinsically good basic material fail to sell because the writer did not create the characters *for himself* in the *planning stage before* he started to write the story. Consequently it was impossible for him to give his reader the significant details that would have enabled that reader to create the characters for himself.

One of the first steps in helping the reader to create a story character is to give that character a suitable name. *Names individualize.* Names help make a picture. Names are of special importance in a short short where making a character come alive must be accomplished quickly, with a minimum of words. For example, the name Barclay Adams suggests a different person and a different physical appearance from the name Pete Stokes. Recently a student sent me the manuscript of a short short in which the main character, a daring, reckless, amorous adventurer was named Sam. The name didn't suit the character at all. It was detrimental rather than helpful to the reader creation of this character. Never forget that names are character tags that help the reader to *individualize* the character until that character is more fully developed for him.

As an aid to *contrasting* the characters in a short short, their names should be very different, not only to express different types, but to differentiate them for the reader so the reader will not be confused as to who is who. For instance, don't name two women characters

Mamie and Janie, even though the name in each case helps to characterize. Get contrast by using different sounds, such as Mamie and Janet, or by varying the number of syllables, as Mamie and Jan.

Another way to make characters in a short short seem real and alive is to give them an *occupation*. It is a deeply ingrained habit to think of people *in relation to* what they do to earn a living, or to occupy their lives, provided they are gainfully employed. A short short character without an occupation must necessarily be somewhat vague and colorless. A *hobby* is also helpful in giving convincingness to your story characters. The moment you say a person plays tennis, or collects Chinese prints, or raises English sheep-dogs, or is a skilled fencer, you have made it possible for the reader to create that person in his mind—a person having a definite physical appearance and more or less definite character traits.

The writer of short shorts should keep clearly in mind the difference between *characterization* and *individualization*, though when talking about creating characters we often include them both. Strictly speaking, characterization has to do with character traits; that is, kindness, unselfishness, generosity, etc. Whereas individualization has to do with action, appearance, etc., that do not indicate any particular character trait, but that help to *make the person come alive* as an individual. Characterization and individualization may often be accomplished simultaneously through a typical action or reaction on the part of the story person, though this is not always the case. And to do this effectively takes a lot of careful planning on the part of the writer. Indeed it is the mark of the professional.

For example, you may individualize a character by saying he has a scar on his right cheek, or that he has lost the first two fingers of his left hand, or that he always carries an ebony cane, or that he lifts one eyebrow as he talks. These details, as you see, give no hint of the character traits these persons may possess. These persons may be kind or cruel, patient or irritable, hard or warm-hearted. The reader has no idea. But he does know that each one is an *individual* and not a *type*. And this is important. Let it always be remembered that the reader is interested in individuals far more than he is interested in types. For example, if you say a man is a plumber, he is a type; but if you say he is a plumber who has only one arm, a red-headed wife and six children, one being a genius with a mouth organ, you still

know nothing about the plumber's *character.* But he has thereby become for you an *individual,* and therefore interesting.

If your purpose is to characterize this plumber and at the same time individualize him, you might say something like this:

> Mike Andrews eased his two hundred and fifty pound bulk into the well-wired chair in front of his battered desk. Slowly he drew the piece of paper towards him. Read it through carefully. He hesitated only a moment. Making no comment to the gimlet-eyed, foppishly dressed man standing impatiently at his elbow, Mike folded the paper once, tore it in two, and dropped the pieces in a waste paper basket.
>
> "Go peddle your phony schemes somewhere else, Bub," Mike said as he rose.

Mike is *individualized* by his great weight, his wired office chair, his scratched and scarred desk. He is *characterized* by his deliberate physical movements and thought, the firmness of his decision, his laconic, blunt speech, and by his courageous act in defying and dismissing the obviously dishonest person to whom he is speaking. This unnamed man has also been characterized by the word "gimlet-eyed," and individualized by the words "foppishly dressed."

The writer of short shorts should study individualization as carefully as he does characterization, because *individualization plays such an important part in short short writing.* Readers don't like to be confused.

In some short shorts the dominant character trait of the main character is not revealed until the last line, where it furnishes the Surprise Ending. Previous to that point the main character has been individualized only, or the reader has been led to believe that he is motivated by a character trait other than the one that actually does motivate him.[2]

When you actually *characterize* a story actor, you show that he possesses one or more distinct character traits. These character traits may be revealed through action, reaction, dialogue, thoughts, and speech and other characteristics. The direct statement of a character trait is often the least desirable method, unless followed at once

[2] For further study of character motivation, read Chapter XII of *Characters Make Your Story.*

by action *showing* that character trait. A good illustration of this is a short short summarized on page 37.[3] The title itself tells the reader what the dominant character trait of the main character is—meanness. Then the story shows the man acting in a mean (characteristic) manner.

Keep your characters consistent throughout your story. Only very rarely is it possible to show change of character in a short short, though it was done and quite successfully in the story, MEANEST MAN. Here the unselfish devotion of a dog caused the "meanest man" to return that devotion. However, it was not implied that his mean attitude toward the rest of the world was modified in any way.

If you have fully created your characters in your own mind, and have endowed each one, especially the main character, with one dominant character trait, you will have little trouble in making your story characters consistent. But if you have not done this, your story characters may act inconsistently and erratically, therefore unconvincingly. When this happens, the reader is confused or loses interest entirely. And artistically the unity of the story is destroyed.

In a short short, characterization, individualization, description and building the appropriate emotion must be done almost simultaneously. Don't imagine for a moment that this is done laboriously and by the use of many details. Don't forget your reader has an almost unlimited store of experience and information that you, as a writer, may take for granted. He likes to *collaborate* with you by using his own imagination to create characters, settings and action from the few *significant details* you give him. He is skilled in this and thoroughly enjoys doing it. *Give details,* whenever you can, *as pictures,* not obviously as information. And *do it through action, as your story is moving forward.* Incidentally, never let the reader become conscious that you are giving him necessary facts.

The following opening paragraph from the short short, MEANEST MAN, already cited, will illustrate this point:

> Mr. Major talked snippy and chased boys off his lawn. They said he didn't even like dogs, and a man who hates dogs is pretty low. Mr. Lycom, the minister, said he had been that way only since his wife died; but nothing can excuse a man like that.

[3] MEANEST MAN by Lee Wichelns. *Liberty,* June 13, 1942.

> I used to see him going all about the town, shopping in Doncher's market, crossing the street, doing practically everything any other man might do. That was funny, because here was a man who hated dogs and now he was being led around by one. A Seeing-Eye dog. And for five years! [4]

Here are five sentences that accomplish the following ends: Introduce and name the main character. Characterize him generally as mean, specifically as not liking boys or dogs. Tell the reader that his wife is dead. Intimate his approximate age. Tell that he has been blind for five years, and that he owns a Seeing-Eye dog.

All this information has been presented in an interesting way, by the use of narration. The narration, however, is dynamic and *not* passive. It is filled with *action* and *emotion,* and helps the reader to create a series of mental pictures. The passive verb "was" appears but once, and that is in a comment on, or summing-up of a situation, "That was funny. . . ."

Now let us look at another short short opening paragraph[5] and see how another writer, working with different material, accomplishes much the same ends:

> In the parked car Mr. Peters' face grew poppy-red while his right hand doubled into a fist. He turned to his wife at the steering wheel and spoke with the severity of an outraged Roman father.

The writer used thirty-five words in this opening paragraph. Analyze these sentences and write down the separate purposes they accomplish, and the information they give the reader. You know the kind of man Mr. Peters is and you have a clear mental picture of him.

Now a final example, from the story, A PAIR OF GLOVES, cited previously in Chapter II:

> His name was Nikholai. Nikholai Gregorievich. . . . There was nothing to distinguish him from ten million other Red soldiers. . . . He grinned broadly, the grin splitting his square, rugged face.

[4] MEANEST MAN by Lee Wichelns. *Liberty,* June 13, 1942.
[5] SALES TALK by Horatio Winslow. *Collier's,* October 25, 1941.

If you are ambitious to write good, salable short shorts, then *practice writing opening paragraphs* that characterize your main actor and at the same time individualize him. Of course first paragraphs must do much more than this. Still other essentials of short short opening paragraphs will be discussed in detail when we come to study Short Short Beginnings in Chapter IX.

Practice writing single lines that will characterize major and minor actors farther along in your story. See how many things you can accomplish in *one sentence*. Remember that one of the aims of both individualization and characterization is to arouse an emotion in the reader toward the character. Reader interest in any character is slight until he *feels an emotion* toward that character. This may be any one of numberless emotions ranging from hate or pity to mild amusement. As soon as a character is introduced, the reader should feel some emotion toward him. And this emotion sets the keynote of the story.

Character traits in action arouse emotion in the reader. If a story character acts in an admirable way, or gives the impression of being an admirable person, the reader feels the emotion of liking. If the story character acts in an unadmirable way, or gives the impression of being an unadmirable person, the reader feels dislike for that person. For example, the opening paragraph above, presenting Mr. Peters, arouses amusement in the reader and a feeling (created by comparing him to an outraged Roman father) that he is a good fellow at heart. Whereas if he had been compared to the Roman emperor, Nero, the emotional effect would have been quite different. Don't leave the reader unaware of, or confused concerning the emotion you *want him to feel toward* your story characters.

It is a good idea to write down the name of each story character and after it the emotion you want the reader to feel toward him. This *clarification of your own thought* will help you to build this desired emotion in subtle as well as obvious ways for your reader.

In creating your short short characters the plan to follow is this:

1. Create them fully in your own mind before you start to write your story.

2. Keep them simple and permit them to display only one dominant character trait in action.

3. Give only enough significant details to enable the reader to create the characters for himself.

4. Be sure that your main character is the most interesting and the most sharply individualized person in the story.

5. Build in the reader one definite emotion toward each character, whether that emotion be pity, sympathy, admiration, hate, fear, etc., or any liking tinged with amusement.

If the characters in your short short measure up to the requirements outlined above, you are fairly certain to have a publishable story.

Method of Study

1. Think of three names for women, and three names for men. Write after each one the physical appearance, social and educational status, one item that individualizes, and one character trait that might belong to a person having this name. Follow this with the emotion you think would be aroused in the reader by this person.
2. Make a list of at least six occupations and six hobbies that would tend to both characterize and individualize story characters.
3. Write a paragraph dealing with a story character, in which you individualize him, but do not reveal any definite character traits.
4. Rewrite and expand the above so that character traits are revealed. Select both character traits and methods of individualization that will arouse definite emotional reactions in the reader toward the character.
5. Write an opening paragraph for a short short in which you introduce two characters, indicate one character trait of each, individualize each, and arouse an appropriate emotion in the reader toward each. Do not overlook your setting in this.

CHAPTER V

Planning the Plotted Short Short

THE term "plotted story" is indefinite. Some people mean one thing when they use the term, and some mean another. In fact, it is difficult to get any two people to agree on exactly what the word "plot" means. Because of this, before we begin our discussion, let us define the words "plotted story" as they will be used in this chapter and throughout this book.

A plotted story is one in which the main character (Actor A) from the Beginning, has a purpose to achieve, a problem to solve, or a decision to make. It is a story of effort, of struggle, mental or physical or both, *toward a clearly defined goal.* The action of the story is concerned with the achievement of the problem or the failure to achieve it, or with the reaching of a decision. Other types of stories we shall call "planned stories," because they are *planned to create dramatic and emotional effects that do not stem mainly from struggle within the stories* themselves to achieve a purpose or to reach a decision.

Since great numbers of short shorts published in the better paying markets and practically all the short shorts published in the secondary markets are plotted, it follows that both the student-writer and the professional should find out all he can about *how* these plotted stories are created. You may be sure this creation is not done in a fine frenzy by writers who depend on "inspiration." It is done by writers who, as careful craftsmen, are fully conscious of what they are doing and who know the best possible ways of doing it. A good short short, like a good statue or a good opera or a good pie, doesn't "just hap-

pen." Back of that statue, that opera and that pie lies study, thought, directed practice, and planning.

First, let us look at the different kinds of PURPOSE plots, see what they are, how to create them, and how to use them as blueprints for interesting, dramatic short shorts.

PURPOSE plots are those plots that have a main character who has a purpose that he *achieves by the use of specific means;* or abandons of his own volition *because he finds his purpose no longer worth while or attractive;* or fails to achieve *because of something he himself does or fails to do* while trying to achieve his purpose.

Note carefully these italicized phrases. The story in which the main character is forced, *by outside circumstances,* to abandon his purpose, or fails to accomplish his purpose through causes he has not set in motion, does not fall into this category. They will be discussed in Chapter VII.

There are three types of PURPOSE stories: PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT, BITER-BIT and PURPOSE ABANDONMENT. We shall examine these in the order of their popularity with short short writers, with editors who buy short shorts, and with the reading public.

PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT SHORT SHORTS

PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT short shorts are of four types, *the type depending on the means used to accomplish the purpose.* Sometimes more than one means is used to accomplish a purpose. But one means will always outweigh the other; that is, be more important than the other. *It is the most important means that determines the type.*

The four types of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT stories are:

1. Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Ingenuity.
2. Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Special Capacity.
3. Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Courage.
4. Purpose Accomplishment by Means of a Weapon.

As you will readily see, ingenuity may be combined with special capacity, courage with the use of a weapon, and so on indefinitely. But the *most important means* is the means that will be stressed over and over through the story—the means *planted* so the reader will know it is present and so find it acceptable and believable in the big climax scene in the story's End.

1. *Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Ingenuity*

A hero who solves his problem by *Ingenuity* is very popular in the short short field. One reason is that people like to read about story characters who are clever and who get out of trouble by using their brains; in other words, who solve their problems by matching their wits against the world. Still another reason this type is popular is that this plot *makes a surprise ending easy.* All the writer has to do is to hide from the reader, until the last line, *the means* the main character uses to solve his problem—then reveal it. Readers love this story type.

2. *Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Special Capacity*

Next in popularity among the PURPOSE stories in the short short field is the hero who achieves his purpose by using a *Special Capacity.* This may be an *ability* he has to judge character correctly in some special way, or it may be an *acquired skill* in the use of garden tools, or it may be a *knowledge* of obscure historical facts. There is really no end to the Special Capacities—abilities, skills, knowledge—that story characters may possess and *use to solve* their story problems. Very often, along with this Special Capacity the hero also uses Ingenuity. The two make a fine combination.

3. *Purpose Accomplishment by Means of Courage*

Courage comes next as a popular means of solving the hero's problem. We all admire people who have courage, either physical or mental. So it is not difficult to create liking and sympathy for a character who solves his problem courageously. But be sure when planning a story of this type that your hero is not merely courageous as a person, *but definitely uses* his courage *to solve* his problem and *achieve* his purpose.

4. *Purpose Accomplishment by Means of a Weapon*

A weapon is often used in short shorts as *a means of achieving* a purpose; used by the main character, of course. A weapon may be anything the hero uses to threaten to inflict, or actually inflict physical injury on the villain and that brings about the villain's defeat. Writers sometimes show great ingenuity in devising unusual weapons.

I once read a Weapon story in which the weapon was an automobile tire, and another in which the weapon was a can of paprika. And still a third in which it was an icicle. So you see there is no limit to the kinds of weapons that may be used. Along with the use of a weapon there nearly always goes also courage, or ingenuity, or special capacity, but in a less degree. Incidentally the weapon must be appropriate to the punishment for which it is used; otherwise if you choose heavy iron tongs to catch the butterfly, you will forfeit reader sympathy for your hero.

In these PURPOSE short shorts be sure always that *it is your main character who uses the means that accomplish the purpose.* Never, never, let a minor character step in and do the dramatic deed that brings success. The hero must always solve his own problem. This is not a mere arbitrary rule. Editors demand it. The artistry of your story too demands it. If the efforts of a minor character achieve the purpose of the main character, there is a decided weakening of dramatic effect and a break in the central thread of story interest. Untrained writers have a strong tendency to let minor characters take the center of the stage at the climax. Nothing can more surely destroy the unity of the dramatic and emotional effect of your story than this. Check every plotted short short you write to make sure you have not committed this error.

One important particular in which the short short of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT often—in fact, almost always—differs from the same type of long short is that in the short short the reader is almost never told what the purpose of Actor A is until the last paragraph. In the long short the purpose of Actor A is made clear as soon as possible in order to give a central thread of interest and unify the story. The reason for this difference is two-fold:

1. The short short is so brief that the reader does not have time to become annoyed because he does not know what the main character is trying to accomplish, provided the tempo is fast and the action interesting.

2. Saving the revelation of the purpose of Actor A for the story *until the last line* permits the writer to use it as the "snapper," or Surprise Ending. This is most desirable if it can be done in a *logical, convincing* way.

The following is a summary of a PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by

Means of Ingenuity short short that keeps the purpose of Actor A for a Surprise Ending:

> Mrs. Peters, a smartly dressed, placid-looking middle-aged woman is driving her irascible husband out into the California countryside to look at some property she apparently wants him to buy as a home for them and their daughter, Rita. Mr. Peters is violently opposed to buying the property and settling in California. As the couple talk the reader discovers that Rita married against her father's wishes; married a man whom her parents did not meet. Now she admits her mistake, wants her father to pay for her divorce and let her come home to live. Mr. Peters declares he will do none of these things; Rita has made her bed, now she can lie on it. Mrs. Peters says gently that of course he is the one to decide what shall be done about Rita, but won't he please look at the property anyway. She has made an appointment with the young salesman and they ought at least go through the motions of listening to his sales talk. Mr. Peters grudgingly agrees. In no time at all the young salesman persuades Mr. Peters that California is the only place to live and that this is the only property worth having. The young salesman has a truly remarkable personality and a wonderful sales talk. Mr. Peters comes back to the car in great good humor, says they will go with the young man at once to the real estate office and make a down payment on the property. Mrs. Peters tells her husband firmly to get in the car. Then she drives off without the salesman. Mr. Peters demands an explanation. Mrs. Peters says they are going back to their hotel where Rita is waiting for them. He is going to pay for daughter's divorce and ask her to come home to live. Mrs. Peters adds that he has just proved that Rita is his own daughter, because Rita too fell for a sales talk as her father has just done. Why? Because the property they just looked at is almost worthless and the young fellow who almost sold it to him is the man Rita married.[1]

So Mrs. Peters' purpose for the story, that of bringing her husband to pay for their daughter's divorce and welcoming her to live with them was accomplished. The means she used was Ingenuity.

No special explanations or examples are needed for the stories of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by Means of Special Capacity, Courage

[1] SALES TALK by Horatio Winslow. *Collier's,* October 25, 1941.

or Weapon. They follow the same general line as the story of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by Means of Ingenuity and, of course, they all end in success for Actor A.

BITER-BIT SHORT SHORTS

In a BITER-BIT short short the plan is almost the reverse of that used in the stories of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT and PURPOSE ABANDONMENT. The main character (Actor A) is always a *villain,* the blacker the better. The reader must be made to hate and fear him, *hope he will fail,* instead of liking and sympathizing with him and hoping he will succeed. In the PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT plots the hero succeeds because of his own efforts, and in the BITER-BIT plots the main character, the villain, *fails because of something he himself* does or does not do while trying to accomplish his purpose of wrongdoing. This wrongdoing usually, though not always, involves harming an innocent, helpless and likable character. This type is usually the story of retribution.

The BITER-BIT plot lends itself very well to the short short for several reasons: One is it makes a *surprise ending* comparatively easy, the Surprise Ending being the revelation of what the villain did or didn't do that brought about his defeat: or rather the significance to the plot of what he did or didn't do. Because the reader is always allowed to see what the villain did, *but is kept from knowing its significance* until the pay-off or snapper line, where it comes as a surprise.

Not too many long shorts are written with the BITER-BIT plot, the reason being the extreme difficulty of holding reader interest through a long story *with a main character who is unlikable.* It takes great technical skill on the part of the author, yet Octavus Roy Cohen frequently does it. But in a short short the reader doesn't have time to lose interest because the story is necessarily dealing with a sharp dramatic crisis covering a brief time lapse.

Remember, this is not the plot where the villain is defeated by another character, except in a secondary sense. If a minor character is an instrument in the defeat of the villain, it is only because *the act of the villain* made it possible for the minor character to defeat him. When a villain is defeated by another character in the story, acting alone and with no help from the villain, you have a different kind of

story, one that must be planned and written differently in order to achieve a satisfying and dramatic effect.

BITER-BIT plots enable the writer *to build a high degree of suspense at the point of climax* where it appears certain that the villain is going to succeed. After that the end must come quickly.

Summary of a BITER-BIT story:

> A man is driving along a lonely road late at night, returning to Tremont, the small town where he lives. He picks up a man, gives him a lift. When they reach Tremont, the passenger orders the man to keep on driving and at the same time pushes a gun in his ribs. When they get into the town, the man dares not signal to anyone that he is in trouble. He stops for a red light. The passenger orders him not to try any funny business. A cop the man knows well is on duty. The man waits for the green light, then goes on. The passenger orders him to keep on his side of the line, obey every stop sign. Outside the town limits the passenger orders the man out of the car and to start walking back to Tremont. The man obeys. The passenger drives off with his car. In a few moments the town cop drives up, tells the man to get in . . . they're driving to the next town to pick up the thief. The cop explains that when he saw the man driving so carefully he knew something was wrong —the man had always jumped the light before. So the cop phones ahead, telling the police in the next town to stop the car and arrest the driver.[2]

The villain had brought about his own defeat by forcing the driver to be too law-abiding.

PURPOSE ABANDONMENT SHORT SHORT

There is only one kind of PURPOSE ABANDONMENT story. While it does not, strictly speaking, end in success for Actor A, it does end in *happiness* for Actor A. Or, in some cases, the greatest amount of happiness possible under the circumstances. This story type involves making a decision, but it is not a DECISION story, as will be seen when we come to study the DECISION plot.

[2] YELLOW FOR CAUTION, by Corey Ford and Alstair MacBrain. *Collier's*, September 24, 1938.

In the PURPOSE ABANDONMENT short short, the hero (Actor A) has a purpose that, if achieved, will bring him unhappiness, or disaster of some kind. But *unaware of this, as is the reader too,* the hero struggles toward the realization (achievement) of his desired goal. From the Beginning of the story to almost or quite the last paragraph Actor A struggles single-heartedly to achieve his purpose. *Remember he does not swerve or turn aside from his goal that to him seems utterly desirable.* Yet often the reader knows it is not desirable, and suspense is built because the reader hopes Actor A will not achieve his purpose. At the final climax of the story *something dramatic happens* and the hero sees his purpose in its true light. Hence he abandons it as not worth while, or as productive of suffering or sorrow. *Yet he does not do this until* he has the achievement of his purpose *within his grasp.* Actor A must not abandon his purpose while there is the least uncertainty as to his being able to achieve it. Otherwise the story drama is weak.

The PURPOSE ABANDONMENT story, in common with the DECISION story, is *primarily a story of mental conflict,* and, therefore, has to be planned very carefully in order to *externalize* the *mental struggle* of Actor A in dramatic action.

Summary of a PURPOSE ABANDONMENT short short:

> A woman of forty, a sales clerk, finds that her worthless husband, whom she has not seen for sixteen years, has returned. He has taken the fifty dollars she had saved by a hundred economies for the purpose of paying the entrance fee for her daughter's first year in college. She tells him unless he puts the money back she will call the police. (That is her purpose for the story, to call the police and recover the fifty dollars.)
>
> She hears her daughter coming and goes to the front door to meet her. The daughter thinks her father is all right—the only trouble was that he and her mother were different, couldn't get along. The girl is very lovely, worthy of all the love and sacrifice her mother has given that she may have a happy girlhood. The mother goes back into the kitchen. By this time the husband is gone, and with him the fifty dollars. She goes to the phone to call the police. Then remembers how rich she is in having the love of her daughter; her husband has nothing like that. He is poor, will always be poor in

the things of life that count. She abandons her purpose and lets him go. She plans ways to borrow the fifty dollars and will work harder than ever to pay it back.[3] (It is foreshadowed that this course of action will bring her happiness, while if she had called the police and had her husband arrested, she would always have regretted doing so.)

DECISION SHORT SHORTS

The DECISION story is one in which the main character is faced in the story beginning with the necessity of making a decision between two courses of action. The story is concerned with his *swaying between these two decisions* and his final choice of a course of action. The main character should not sway equally between the two courses of action, but *lean very much more toward the one that the reader fears will bring that main character unhappiness.*

There is one exception to this. That is the DECISION story in which the reader believes that either decision will bring unhappiness. This type of story rises to a high dramatic climax, the decision is made and then it is shown that happiness will follow. In a story belonging to this type, the main character may swing equally toward both decisions.

Special care must be taken when planning and writing any short short of DECISION *to make sure that dramatic action brings about the decision,* and that the decision is made suddenly. If the decision is arrived at gradually, because of thoughts in the mind of the main character, it is difficult if not impossible to achieve a dramatic climax, or in fact, any climax at all. And a short short without a dramatic or emotional climax isn't likely to sell.

Both the short short that is a story of PURPOSE ABANDONMENT and the short short that is a story of DECISION tend to become "think pieces" unless the writer *consciously gives them dramatic treatment.* There are devices for making mental conflict dramatic, but their use requires considerable knowledge and skill. The method sometimes used is to split the personality of the main character in two, and have the resulting *two* personalities argue the question between them. However, a much easier way to make these stories dramatic is to create two characters in addition to the main

[3] BIRTHDAY PACKAGE, by Anne Wormser. *Ladies' Home Journal,* October 1942.

character, one personifying the *restraint* that counsels taking the right course, one personifying the *impulse* to follow the wrong course, the course that will result in unhappiness for the main character (Actor A). Sometimes only one character besides Actor A is needed in a DECISION short short for this personification. In such a case this character would personify restraint, because for dramatic effect the main character would represent impulse.

Since DECISION stories are *primarily psychological character conflict* stories and depict mental conflict between two opposing characteristics of one person, they are not especially adaptable to the short short form. Usually such conflicts and the necessarily complicated character delineation that is necessary to present them properly require a larger canvas than is offered by the short short. However, salable short short DECISION stories can be and are written. To that end, the professional writer should know *how* to go about plotting and writing such a short short.

In a long DECISION story there are usually three to five swings of the pendulum as Actor A sways between the two possible decisions. But in the short short there is not time for more than one complete swing. Hence *the story opens very near the end* where there is one swing from and one toward the right, the happiness-giving decision. The last swing, of course, constitutes the climax and immediately follows the highest point of dramatic action. This swing ends in the happiness-giving decision.

Summary of a short short DECISION story:

> A stage magician, no longer young but a short time before at the top of his profession, has suffered a nervous breakdown following the death of his wife. He has been unable to work for some time, is without funds, and has lost confidence in himself. A theatrical agent offers him top billing on a show. The magician fears he has lost his skill, that he will fail in this important act. He is faced by the necessity of deciding whether he will accept the offer or decline it.
>
> When the story opens the magician feels sure he cannot accept it. He goes into a movie to think it over. A car is being given away that night to the holder of the ticket bearing the lucky number. Next to the magician sits a young married couple. He overhears them planning hopefully what they will do if they win the car. The

number is called. It begins with the number nine. The young man exclaims in disappointment that they have lost—his number begins with six. The magician leans over, taps the young man on the hand, tells him to look again; that nine upside down looks like a six. The young man looks again at his ticket and sees that it is the winning number. The magician rises and leaves the theater. He has decided to take the important booking he has been offered and he is sure he can make good, for never in all his professional life did he do the forefinger switch with more skill and finesse than tonight when he slipped his own winning ticket into the young man's hand and removed the losing number.[4]

The surprise in this story, and in most DECISION short shorts, is secured by the revelation, not of the decision itself, *but of the cause that brought about the decision.* In this case the cause of the man's making the right decision was the return of his old skill when he impulsively performed an unselfish act in giving his winning ticket to the young man.

NECESSITY FOR FORM IN FICTION WRITING

There is much loose, inaccurate talk about literary form in general and plot in particular by people who see literary form as something superficial, with little or no understanding of *what it is,* the necessity for it, and how to use it to get desirable and highly artistic literary effects. You may hear them say that plot is mechanical, and all plotted stories inartistic. True, a plotted story *may* be mechanical and inartistic, but so may any other type of story, whether it be a "planned" story, or a formless "slice of life." Whether a story is artistic or inartistic depends on the talent, skill and feeling of the writer in *organizing* and *presenting* his material. Not on whether the story has or does not have a plot, in the sense we are now using the word "plot," which is form—and *all art has form.*

One fact stands out as irrefutable: a reproduction of life as it is actually lived is not art. It is literary photography in its lowest form. It isn't even first-class reporting, for a good reporter *arranges* his facts so that the reader sees their significance. No amount of glib talk, no dressing up in a "literary" magazine can make an unorganized story anything but a practically meaningless arrange-

[4] SLEIGHT OF HEART by Mike O'Leary. *Collier's,* Jan. 18, 1941.

ment of words. An honest artist in whatever field of creative endeavor he may work, knows that *he must take the raw materials of life and give them form, significance, pattern;* put something of his very self into them before he can make a valid claim to have *created* anything worthy of being called an artistic achievement.

Form, design, significance; these are the very essence of art. Fiction, even in its shortest expression that we are now studying, is an art form, though I am the first to admit that not all published short shorts are artistic, plotted or unplotted. But this is the fault of the writers, not of the form. Many plotted short shorts are highly artistic and they may be found in most types of magazines including the "literary" periodicals themselves. One has only to read the short shorts in a few issues of these magazines to prove the truth of this statement.

Life, from whatever viewpoint, is for the most part chaotic. No real-life experience is ever properly begun or properly finished. *Causes* are hidden from sight in the past; *effects* that can only be guessed at are yet to appear in the future. The relationship of cause and effect can rarely be discerned except in a fragmentary and, therefore, unsatisfying manner. Yet we never cease searching for beginnings and endings in life, for causes and effects, for significance, both dramatic and emotional. We hunger and thirst for these in real life. And real life, for the most part, refuses them to us. The writer, who is also an artist, gives them to us in his stories and we reward him with gratitude, fame and money. He has taken the raw material of life and molded it into beautiful, satisfying art forms; just as a sculptor, taking a rough block of granite, has carved from its heart a statue that delights us with its beauty, its truth, and its significance.

Fiction is often more true than life itself. It can, and does—in the hands of writers who know their profession and their art—show us the *significance that underlies* everyday happenings, as well as occurrences of the most bizarre kind. *The best fiction makes clear the meaning and dignity of life,* in light as well as serious presentation. Perhaps no art form and certainly no literary form, is more hedged about by rigid rules than poetry. But I have never yet heard a fine poem called "inartistic," or "mechanical," because it was written in the exacting form of a Shakespearean sonnet, or

as a *triolet* or *rondeau*. In comparison with the poet, the writer of short short fiction is as free as air. Yet the fiction writer will do well to learn *form in relation to fiction* and *how to use it to achieve artistic effects*. The fiction writer will do well to *accept the limitations of his medium,* learn to use them, to make the most of them as aids to creating beauty and giving enjoyment; instead of chafing against form, even flouting it as bonds that hamper his creative expression.

Any worth-while story that is neither a story of PURPOSE, nor a story of DECISION is constructed according to a *plan* that is just as clear-cut as any *plot* that was ever devised. There are many more types of story plans than there are types of story plots. And so, in one sense, the writer of the planned story is freer than the writer of the plotted story. Yet in another sense he is not. Why? Because once having *chosen his plan* he must not deviate from it. He must tell the kind of story the plan calls for, the kind that he has promised his reader in his story Beginning. If he does deviate from that plan he will destroy the unity of effect that his story is to create. Never forget the underlying truth of all art: that *the nature of the material dictates the treatment.*

Such adherence to a plan, in the writing of a short short, requires a greater measure of knowledge, skill and self-discipline than does adherence to a plot. So do not imagine for a moment that a story without a plot is easier to write than a story with a plot. Exactly the contrary is the case.

You will see that all this is true and the reasons why it is true when we come to study how to write the short short without a plot. No creative person can dispense with all form and still produce work that is intelligible; any more than we, as individuals, can function on the physical plane when freed from the "limitations" of physical form. It simply isn't possible. *We have to accept form in order to create anything tangible.*

Method of Study

1. Write in your own words a clear definition of a plotted story.
2. How many kinds of plotted stories are there? Name them.
3. Write a brief original story summary of each of the four kinds of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT plots, the story in each case

being suitable to development as a short short. Write at the top of each summary the purpose of Actor A for the story and the means or combination of means he uses to achieve success.

4. Write a brief original story summary of a BITER-BIT suitable for development as a short short. Write at the top exactly what Actor A, the villain, does that brings about his defeat.
5. Write a brief original story summary of a DECISION story suitable for development as a short short. Write at the top exactly what it is that Actor A has to decide.

CHAPTER VI

The Planned or Off-Pattern Short Short

THE types of short shorts we shall now discuss are without a plot in the sense that they are not primarily stories of PURPOSE or stories of DECISION. *Each type follows a clearly defined plan and has a distinct form,* or aim. Within this general plan or form an infinite number of variations are possible.

The writers of these planned short shorts take the raw material of life and arrange it so that it has *significance* that is *not dependent on plot.* The hero (Actor A) in a story of this type may have a purpose or reach a decision, but neither the purpose nor the necessity for a decision is present from the beginning of the story, nor is either the focal point of interest in the story. When present, they are the means used *to build an emotional effect* that gives the story its poignance and meaning. A few thumb-nail summaries of published short shorts falling into the category of planned stories will serve to clarify this important point:

Example:

> A boy has been given a young puppy only a few hours before the story opens. Of course the boy loves the puppy very much. But the puppy is unhappy, will not play or eat, because it misses its home and its mother. The boy discovers that his father and mother are about to separate and break up his home. Going back to his puppy through the kitchen he refuses his favorite cookies. He cannot eat. Reaching the puppy, he sees the parallel between himself and it. Taking the puppy in his arms the boy trudges back to the

place where his father bought it and thus returns the puppy to its home and its mother.[1]

As you see, the boy reaches a decision, that of taking the puppy back, but the boy does not face the necessity for making a decision from the Beginning of the story, nor is there any swaying between two courses of action. *As soon as the situation is made clear, the boy reaches a decision at once as to what he must do.* There is not a moment's hesitation on his part. The aim of this story is not to create suspense ending in satisfaction when the right decision is reached, but to create a blend of admiration and sympathy for the boy and *illustrate a theme,* the theme being that children are the greatest sufferers from a divorce.

Example:

A man and his wife have a mild quarrel at breakfast when she says he is not romantic. He retaliates by asking why she didn't marry Fergus, who had been around a good deal before their marriage. She replies that she wishes she had. Later, at the husband's office, a secretary brings in Fergus' business card. When the man appears he is far from romantic in appearance or manner and shows no inclination to meet again the man's wife. Fergus is traveling through the city on business and appears to think of nothing else. The husband cannot bear to have his wife disappointed in her romantic ideas about Fergus. So he scratches out the words on the card pertaining to business, leaving only Fergus' name. Then he goes to a florist shop and sends a large box of mixed flowers to his wife, enclosing Fergus' card. When he arrives home that evening the flowers have arrived. The wife is smiling. When questioned, the husband says that Fergus pretended he came on business, but he really wanted to see her. However, business interfered so he sent flowers this time. Just then another box of flowers arrives; American Beauty roses that his wife dislikes. On top is Fergus' personal card. The wife knows now what her husband has done and why. Fergus, she realizes, would not have had enough imagination to send flowers for mixed bouquets. "You romantic idiot," she says to her husband. He kisses her and they both laugh.[2]

[1] NEW HOME by William Cole. *Cosmopolitan,* March 1940. See Appendix.
[2] ROMANCE FOR MOLLY by Lucian Cary. *Collier's,* Feb. 28, 1942.

As you see, in this story the man does not achieve his purpose, and his purpose does not appear until the story is well along. His efforts to keep intact his wife's romantic illusions concerning Fergus bring about the opposite result, a clever twist that gives the reader a surprise at the End. Thus, though the main character does have a purpose for part of the story, the story does not have a purpose plot. The story is built to a Surprise Ending. It holds interest in its intrinsically "light" material by good characterization and progressive action until the Surprise Ending is reached.

It is important that you understand the *fundamental structure* of every short short you read and, more important still, of every short short you write. Even though the main character has a purpose or makes a decision somewhere in the story, don't jump to the conclusion that the story must therefore be a story of PURPOSE or a story of DECISION. It may be what, at first glance, you think it is; but it will pay you to check carefully and make sure whether or not you are right. That point determined, go one step farther in your analysis. Stripping the meat of the story from its bones, examine carefully its skeletal structure. Ask yourself the following questions: *What is this story about? What is the emotional effect it is intended to create in the reader?* The answers to these questions will be of inestimable help to you in getting ideas for your own original short shorts, as we shall see indirectly in this chapter, and directly, clearly, and with illustrative examples and exercises, in Chapter VIII.

A complete list of the types of planned short shorts cannot be made, since new ones are frequently originated—or perhaps I should say, the *germ ideas* for them are frequently observed in real life. However, the overwhelming majority of planned short shorts published in the smooth-paper general-interest magazines fall into one of the types we shall examine in this chapter and in the chapter immediately following. Sometimes a short short is a blend of, or has the characteristics of, two or even three types. But in such stories there is always one type-characteristic that is more important than the others. If this were not so, the effect would be blurred instead of sharp, because the reader's attention would not be focused *on one point, one unified effect.* We shall return to this from time to time, as we examine the main types of planned short

shorts that are usually *dramatized significant* incidents or situations.

Please note the use of the words *dramatized,* and *significant* as applied to situations and incidents. An incident may make an interesting little personal experience story to tell a friend, but until that incident is dramatized and given significance it is not material for a salable short short.

For example, you see a blind man crossing a street saved from being struck by a car through the efforts of his Seeing-Eye dog. That is an incident. Told exactly as it happened it would not be a short short. But if you showed the man as being harsh, even cruel, toward the dog, then presented the dog's unswerving loyalty and devotion to duty as shown by his saving his master's life, you would give the anecdote *significance.* You would then have a basic idea that might be developed into an acceptable short short. See the difference?

An example of a situation without story drama or story significance is that of a woman weeping at her husband's grave. But that's no story. However, if she were there, not in grief but to escape from the police who are following her in order to apprehend her for some criminal act, then the situation begins to take shape as a short short. Of course, neither of these examples is a fully developed short short. Their development has merely begun.

At this point it will be worth our while to examine briefly what we shall take up in more detail later: The emotions that the successful writer of short shorts must take into account. Never forget that *readers like to feel* much more than they like to *think.* At least, this is true while they are reading fiction. Therefore, it will be immensely to your advantage to *make sure that your readers feel a specific emotion* toward each of your story characters, even though, provided your story demands no more, that emotion is no stronger or more important than mild liking, or amusement, or faint dislike. Don't ever use dummies for characters toward whom no one, not even you, the author, feels any emotion whatsoever! Be sure that your readers feel specific emotions as your story progresses. Be sure that they feel one dominant emotion at the End of your story, and that all these emotions will be those your readers *like to feel.* This important subject of emotion can only be mentioned here, but it is one to which the ambitious writer will be wise to give his earnest atten-

tion. Emotion with special reference to its use in the short short will be dealt with more fully in Chapter XIV, which is devoted exclusively to this subject.

Emotions readers like to feel toward a story hero are: Interest, liking, sympathy, admiration, amusement, pity.

Emotions readers like to feel toward a story villain are: Dislike, repulsion, hatred, fear, and a deep satisfaction in his defeat.

Emotions readers like to feel as they read a story are: Curiosity, interest, suspense, fear (that the villain or villain-force may win), hope (that the villain or villain-force will fail and that the hero will win), surprise, the pleasure of recognition, amusement.

Emotions the reader likes to feel at the End of a story: Satisfaction, a sense of the inevitability of the ending whether "happy" or "unhappy," amusement, surprise, plus whatever emotion or blend of emotions the whole story is planned to build toward the main character.

Having considered all of the above, we are now ready to turn our attention to the most important types of the planned, as distinguished from the plotted, short short:

(1). *The story of misunderstanding, discovery* and *reversal* of a plan of *action.* Since the main character has no important plan of action in mind that can be reversed, the Surprise Ending reveals that the facts or story situation are different from what Actor A *believed* them to be. The reversal of this *mistaken belief* brings peace of mind to the main character, *relieves a condition of worry or mental distress.*

Example:

> A middle-aged business man, a kind likable character is deeply disturbed because he believes that his secretary, who has been with him for ten years and has looked after him almost as a wife would do, is in love with him. He is faced with what to him is the painful necessity of telling her that he is about to marry another. As the story opens he is waiting in the lounge of his club to meet one of his business executives, his purpose being to tell him of his forthcoming marriage. The meeting and subsequent conversation take place. Then Actor A goes back to his office, dreading more than ever to tell his secretary about his fiancée. The secretary comes in and he, full of forebodings, breaks the news. She breaks down and cries. He begs her not to cry. She says she can't help it, she

is so happy. She has something to tell him, also. She, too is planning to marry, and now she is free to do so since he will have someone to look out for him. She is going to marry the business executive to whom the main character confided his marriage plans only shortly before. They have been in love for a long time, but she felt she couldn't leave her employer without some woman to take care of him. The executive had not told her he loved her until a few minutes before, because—how very absurd!—he had thought she was in love with her boss.[3]

As is readily seen, in this story both the major and the minor characters experienced misunderstanding, discovery and reversal of a belief.

(2). *The story of misunderstanding, discovery and reversal of action as well as a belief*

In this type of short short the main character is *actively planning to do something* specific, his determination to act *being based on a belief*. Then when discovery comes and his belief is reversed, he may do one of two things: he may abandon his proposed course of action, with the *implication* that he adopts a diametrically opposed course; or he may abandon it and be *shown* as following a diametrically opposed course. The story summary given follows the first plan.

A young man is on his way to call on his fiancée. As he goes, he reviews in his mind the situation as he believes it to be and also what he intends to do about it. The evening before he had wanted to take her out, but she had refused saying she wanted to stay in and listen to a Crosby program. But later he had seen her going into an apartment house where a former sweetheart of hers lived. His plans are now to draw her out, listen to her story of how she stayed in all evening listening to the program, washing her stockings, going to bed early. Then he'll confront her with the fact that there had been no Crosby program the night before—it had been cancelled at the last minute—and tell her he knew she had spent the evening at Fred's apartment. As a result, she will beg for forgiveness, swear she cares nothing for Fred and that it will never happen again. But he will leave her; he will pay no attention to her pleadings. The

[3] ONE QUICK CLEAN STROKE by Grace Winston Byrner. *Collier's*, June 21, 1941.

young man arrives at his fiancée's home. When he asks how she liked the Crosby program, she replies she didn't hear it. She had to go out, after all. A friend who lives in the apartment house where Fred used to live was ill and asked her to come over. She spent the evening with her. By the way, did he know that Fred had left for the East? Actor A, because of his *discovery* of the real situation, *reverses his belief* and presumably his *action,* since he does not leave the girl as he had planned to do.[4]

(3). *The story building an emotion toward Actor A*

Some of the strongest and most moving short shorts that are published use this plan, as well as some of the lightest and most amusing. It is a very adaptable plan, because it is so suitable to an infinite variety of story material. You should study the type carefully that you may use it effectively and skillfully as a help in writing salable fiction, both long and short.

(a) *A strong blend of admiration and sympathy*

This type of short short does not, in the very nature of things, have a "happy" Ending, but, on the other hand, a tragic ending should be avoided. The Ending should have a pleasing degree of pathos, but care must be taken not to leave the reader sunk in impenetrable gloom. How to do this we shall see as we go along.

This type of emotional story cannot have a "happy" Ending, because a "happy" Ending removes the possibility of building a strong feeling of sympathy for the main character. If Actor A is happy, there is no cause to feel sorry for him. This story plan is often used when the hero dies in the End. Always the solution of the story situation must seem *inevitable,* and be the best possible ending under all the *circumstances.* If Actor A dies in the End, he does so during, or because of the performance of some unselfish, meritorious act. And his death at that time saves him from certain suffering, either of mind or body, or both, in the immediate future.

In stories of this kind, the hero is generally old. Because of this the reader is not unbearably pained by his death, as would be the case if he were young, his life unlived, and with a chance of happiness still before him—no matter how black the present may appear. Incidentally it is seldom indeed that a writer can sell a short

[4] NOTHING'S WRONG by Walter Doniyer. *Liberty,* June 7, 1941.

short in which a young person dies in the End. After years of collecting short shorts I have only two examples in which a young person dies in the End.

Now for an example of the (a) type:

> An old man, his wife dead, is living with his son, daughter-in-law and little granddaughter. They are in poor circumstances. The old man drives a cab for a living, but he is getting too old to do that. He misses his wife and thinks of her constantly. The daughter-in-law doesn't want him to live with them any longer, as his old-fashioned ways, some of them not as elegant as she would like, annoy her. He discovers this. He is not making enough money to live alone, he knows that soon he will be less able to work than he is now. One day they go for an outing on the bay, using a small launch. The son and his wife take the row boat and go to a distant beach for a swim, leaving the old man to look after his little granddaughter. The child awakes from her nap, falls overboard. The old man jumps into the water. After great effort he manages to get her back on the launch. But he has no strength left to climb the ladder himself. He drowns, his last thought being that he will soon be with his wife.[5]

Stories of this type *require outstanding characterization.* And because of the highly emotional nature of the material, as much objective writing as that material will permit along with great simplicity of presentation. Without such restrained writing, these stories are likely to be maudlin and sentimental, instead of strong and emotionally moving.

Another example already given of this type of short short is the story about the man who bought the doves, CAGED (see Chapter II) and the story about the boy who took the puppy back to its mother, NEW HOME (see Chapter VI). In both of these the emotion built in the reader toward Actor A is one of strong admiration and sympathy. Neither of these stories has a "happy" End in the sense that all is well with the main character when the story ends.

(b) *Strong sympathy with mild admiration or liking*

In short shorts of this type the main character must, of course, be likable, though he need not be wholly admirable. The only actual

[5] OLD HAS BEEN by Alice Booth. *Cosmopolitan,* May 1940.

requisite for Actor A is that the motives that impel him to action, during the time lapse of the story, be good motives. He may or may not perform a meritorious deed. In fact, he may do something wrong, *provided he does it from a good motive.* Usually this type of short short does no more than show a situation, or progressive action, that *leaves the hero in a sad situation in which he bears up with admirable fortitude.* In common with (a) above this plan does not lend itself to the true happy Ending. Often short shorts of this type have a decided theme, either stated, or implicit in the material.

For example:

> A typical businessman and father is importuned by his small daughter to read her a story out of a new book. The father is busy looking over business papers that mean a great deal to his future and to the future of his wife and child, to whom he is really devoted. He says he cannot read to her now, but will do so later. The child makes another appeal, but he absentmindedly sends her away, absorbed in his problem of making money for her future. In the next scene, which takes place after a time lapse of several days, the father is shown reading his child's story book aloud. The child has been killed, struck by an automobile, and he is waiting to go to the funeral. Now he reads from her story book, loud enough, he hopes, for her to hear.[6]

As you see, the reader does not especially admire the man, though sympathizing with him deeply. The man is a typical American business man. Devoted to his family, but in an abstract way, until tragedy brings him to the realization that devotion must be shown every day, in little ways as well as big ways, really to mean very much. This is a theme story as well as a build-up of an emotion the reader likes to feel.

The reader's emotion of sympathy is the strongest factor in the success of this particular story.

(c) *Amusement*

Building the emotion of amusement, or humor toward a main character requires both charming presentation and light material;

[6] LATER by Michael Foster. *Cosmopolitan,* November 1938, reprinted in *Reader's Digest,* November 1940. See Appendix.

material that has no great intrinsic significance, but possesses interesting angles, and a sharp climax or surprise at the End. Short shorts of this type demand great ease and smoothness of presentation, since the slightest straining to be funny is fatal to the creation of the emotion of amusement.

Example:

> A young man is on trial, but the reader does not know what he has done. The story is told through the questions asked him by the judge and his answers to them. The reader feels that the young man is under great stress, but is trying to act with some degree of nonchalance. The story that unfolds is that burglars broke into his house a few nights before. His young wife got the family revolver and pushed it into his hands, urging him to go down and capture the burglars, assuring him that no harm would come to him and everything would be all right. Reluctantly, but with her urging him on, the young husband went down stairs. By pointing the revolver at them, he captured the burglars, just as the police broke open the front door and put the handcuffs on the criminals. The young man then complimented his wife on giving him the gun—but, he states, he was afraid all the time it would go off accidentally and hurt him. The wife assured him that he was perfectly safe—she had taken the bullets out of the gun before giving it to him. "Judge," the young man says as he ends his story, "it was then I bopped her." [7]

The Surprise Ending is that the young man captured the burglars with a gun from which his wife had removed the bullets, and the "snapper" last line tells the reader what the young man is on trial for—for striking his wife. As you see, this story was planned to create the emotion of amusement in the reader—nothing more.

And because of skillful presentation the writer's purpose was accomplished with very slight material.

(4). *Building suspense*

Some very effective short shorts use this as their basic plan. *By every means possible* with the material at hand the writer makes the reader believe that something extremely dramatic and important is *going to happen,* or may happen. The suspense may concern

[7] THE LITTLE WOMAN by Jay Wilson. *Collier's,* March 19, 1938.

what this happening will be, or *when* it will occur, or *if* it will occur. *Everything in the story is concentrated on the one effect of suspense.* Of course setting, characterization, and so on play important parts in this type. But they are no more than necessary background to make the suspense logical and believable.

Example:

> The sheriff of a small western cow town goes to see the owner of one of the saloons on Main Street and asks him if he intends to kill the young cowboy who slapped the saloon owner's face. The saloon keeper didn't kill the kid at the time because the young fellow was without his gun. The saloon keeper says that certainly he will kill the cowboy just as soon as the kid gets a gun. He, the saloon keeper, is known as the best shot in the county. The sheriff then leans over, whispers something to him—the reader does not know what. The sheriff then finds the cowboy, now with his gun, and tries to persuade him to leave town. Tells him he doesn't stand a chance. The cowboy says he is staying. The cowboy then walks slowly, hand on his gun, the length of Main Street, past his enemy's saloon, and back again to where his horse is standing and where the sheriff awaits him. The reader and the sheriff expect the shooting to start any instant. Nothing happens. The saloon owner doesn't try to kill the cowboy. The sheriff tells the cowboy that he, the sheriff, has saved his life. He told the saloon keeper that the cowboy was Billy the Kid, the deadliest killer in the Southwest. The cowboy replies, "I *am* Billy the Kid," mounts his horse, and rides away.[8]

This story has a Surprise Ending the nature of which saves it from being an anti-climax. The reader's interest is held almost up to the Surprise Ending by strong suspense; suspense as to whether one or both men will be killed. Note, however, that the dramatic event on which the suspense is built *never happens.* Yet the reader has no sense of being let down. It is important that you understand *how the writer avoided* ending his story with an anti-climax. This is the device he used: the *real* situation, as revealed in the Surprise Ending, was even more dramatic and fraught with danger for the principals involved than the situation as the reader saw it during

[8] LITTLE STRANGER by Walter Henry. *Collier's,* August 27, 1938.

the Beginning and Body of the story. Thus the story ends on a high peak of dramatic interest.

Method of Study

1. Write a brief summary of an original short short that is planned as a misunderstanding, discovery and reversal story. This may be a reversal of a belief, or a reversal of both belief and action.
2. Write a brief summary of an original short short that is planned as a build-up of the emotions of sympathy and admiration for the main character.
3. Same as above, except that the emotion of sympathy is stressed above that of admiration.
4. Write a brief summary of an original short short that is planned as a build-up of the emotion of amusement.
5. Write a brief summary of an original short short that is planned to build the emotion of suspense.

CHAPTER VII

The Planned or Off-Pattern Short Short (continued)

WHEREVER there are people there are short short ideas. There is never any lack of sound basic material for short shorts—only lack of ability to perceive the basic material, and only lack of skill in developing and presenting the material in an interesting way. *The simplest situations and conditions may be used as bases for salable shorts:* a character trait that can be expressed in dramatic action,[1] an unusual belief that leads to interesting action, a psychological truth that lends itself to dramatic portrayal, and so on indefinitely. Learn to look around you, to open your eyes to the short short material that crowds upon you from every side, from every experience however apparently simple and commonplace it may be.

Analyze short shorts that you read. Endeavor to get down to their basic elements, to discover *what they are about.* This will help you to see germ ideas for short shorts in the people and in the life that is about you. For fuller treatment see Chapter VIII.

Let us now continue our study of the off-pattern short short that we began in the last chapter:

(5). *The story building to a surprise ending*

As we have seen before, the reader likes to feel surprise. So whenever you can create surprise in the last paragraph or the last line

[1] See CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY by Maren Elwood. *Houghton Mifflin.*

of your short short you have achieved a worth-while objective. Of course there are many short shorts with Surprise Endings that include in their effect qualities other than surprise, and these qualities are more important than the surprise. Under the present heading we shall study only those short shorts in which *surprise is the main effect*. There are innumerable situations and action sequences in real life that may serve as bases for short shorts with surprise endings. If they have an important factor that can be kept from the reader until the last paragraph or the last line, they are grist for the short short writer's mill. The same is true if the situation can be made to appear other than it actually is until the last paragraph or last line.

Example of a short short with a Surprise Ending that reveals an unknown factor:

> A time bomb has fallen near a London hospital. A lieutenant asks for volunteers to help remove the bomb. He specifies men of experience in such work and men without families. Many volunteer. One man hesitates when asked if he has a family. He is rejected. The next man in line, named Jenkins, is slight and blond. He says he is experienced and has no family, so he is accepted. Others are accepted. The gang goes to work. After considerable suspense the bomb is removed to a truck which starts away, the gang accompanying it to finally dispose of the bomb. A doctor dashes from the hospital, asks the lieutenant to tell one of his men, a man named Jenkins, that his wife has just given birth to a boy.[2]

There is both suspense and drama in this story and a certain amount of admiration is built for Jenkins because of his determined courage in risking his life to protect his wife and baby. But the main effect is one of surprise, caused by the revelation of the fact that Jenkins' wife is having a baby in the endangered hospital. If the reader had known this fact all along, the story, unless written in an entirely different manner and with a different effect in mind, would have been very flat.

Of course the basic idea of this story of a person struggling for a chance to expose himself to great danger in order to protect, or

[2] TIME BOMB by Milton K. Kalb. *Collier's*, June 28, 1941.

assist in protecting a loved one is not dependent on a war background. Like most all *basic story ideas,* it is timeless and universal in its application.

(6). *The story illustrating a common foible, a psychological twist, or an unusual belief, or standard of conduct*

If you will turn back to Chapter III and look under the heading PLANS USED you will see that twenty-four out of the hundred stories from general-interest magazines were of this type: that is, a fraction under twenty-five per cent. This indicates their popularity with editors and readers. Material for this type is everywhere. If you know only six people, you need look no farther for the basic material for at least a dozen short shorts, because practically every human being has at least two traits of character, or beliefs, or standards of conduct that lend themselves to presentation in the short short form. This is such an important type of short short that I shall give you three widely differing illustrations:

> (a) An Alaskan prospector is down and out again. Always lucky in finding rich gold deposits, he can never bring himself to stay long enough in one place to profit by his discoveries, but must always hurry on, chasing the will-o'-the-wisp rumor concerning a rich strike somewhere else. He is in a camp where he feels everything should belong to him, since it was he who discovered the source of riches, a really paying gold mine. But he hasn't enough money to buy a plug of tobacco. His former partner, who has stayed in the camp and is now rich, stakes him to a few nuggets. By casually tossing two or three of these across the bar, the prospector is able to start a rumor that he has struck it rich again—this time on Rainbow Creek. Before morning the prospector's former partner has bought the controlling interest in the town's gold mine for grub stakes to enable the town's leading citizens to head for Rainbow Creek. The former partner offers the prospector a half-interest in this mine. The prospector rubs his chin thoughtfully and says he'll trade his share of the gold mine for a pair of new boots—his are about worn out. The other demands to know where he is going. He replies that he thinks he'll go down to Rainbow Creek—there might be something to that rumor, after all.[3]

[3] CAME A WHISPER FROM THE MOUNTAINS by Corey Ford. *Collier's,* March 23, 1936.

In this story the common human tendency to believe whatever one hears, whatever its source may be, is utilized as the basic idea. Prospectors are especially prone to believe rumors about gold strikes. There is, of course, *no limit to the variations* that the inventive writer, or the observant writer, may play on this theme.

(b) John Brent's secretary tells him that a man named George Avery is in the outer office, asking to see him. Avery will not state his business, says it is a personal matter. After a moment's silence Brent says to bring the man in. Brent keeps Avery waiting for a few minutes after his entrance, as Brent busily signs letters. Then he looks up, greets his visitor cordially. They were friends fifteen years before. Avery married Mary, the girl Brent wanted. Now, the story reveals, Avery is a financial failure, Brent apparently in the full tide of financial success. Subtly, Brent makes Avery feel the difference in their financial status. Finally Avery says bluntly that he has come to ask Brent for a thousand dollars—Mary is ill and he must have the money to get her away. Brent says slowly, "You haven't any pride, have you, George?" Avery says, "I need a thousand dollars. A thousand dollars can't touch my pride." Brent has his secretary bring in the cash box. Out of it he takes a thousand dollars in bills and gives the money to Avery. The secretary looks surprised. Brent asks Avery for his IOU. Avery leaves. Then Brent tears up Avery's IOU and writes one of his own, putting it in the cash box attaching it to a slip of paper on which is typed, "Petition in Bankruptcy, John Brent. Cash assets sworn to and hereto affixed, $1000 . . ." The secretary inquires nervously what Brent will do. "I can raise a thousand dollars somewhere, Miss Grange," he said, with a touch of pride.[4]

The character trait used as a basis for this story is pride—not a high or even a particularly admirable type, perhaps, but pride nevertheless. Yet with dramatic and skillful presentation it served as the basis for an interesting short short with a Surprise Ending.

(c) The main character is Captain Brickett, of the *U. S. Destroyer*. When the story opens his ship is about to pass a dangerous point of rocks where, years before, a ship that he had commanded was wrecked and many of the men under him lost their lives. Since then,

[4] A MATTER OF PRIDE by William Martin. *Collier's*, Oct. 12, 1941.

whenever he passes this point Captain Brickett can conceal his terror only by the greatest self-control. The accident made him, he believes, a coward. Uneasy, tense, he strains to see through the fog, to catch a glimpse of the rocky shore. He listens with close attention for the sound of breakers. Suddenly he thinks he sees a ship aground on the Point. But he knows a ship can't be there. He only imagines it because of his fear, and memory of the time when his own ship went aground there. He decides desperately to kill his fear of the Point. He will prove that there is no ship there, he only imagines it in the mist. He orders his ship steered straight toward the shore. In a few minutes the Captain sees that the ship is real. It is aground on the rocks of the Point, being pounded to pieces by the waves. Captain Brickett orders out the life boats. All on board the wrecked ship are saved. Later, a superior officer on shore congratulated Captain Brickett and asked how he managed to see the ship when no one else could. Brickett answered slowly, "Because I am a coward." [5]

This story does not use an actual character trait, or a human foible, but a state of mind; specifically, fear. Many other familiar states of mind can be used as the basis for short shorts, with equally good effect.

(7). *The theme short short*

Coupled with sound presentation, almost any theme makes a germ idea for a short short. *A clear-cut theme will often give a dramatic incident the significance necessary to change it* from a mere incident to a satisfactory short short.

Example:

Bill, a policeman, is killed by a small-time crook. Two brother policemen who arrive on the scene of the murder feel that this is a dreadful way for Bill to die—Bill, who was awarded several medals for bravery in the first world war—now shot to death by a third-rate crook. Of course, Bill killed the crook before he died, but that doesn't make them feel any better about Bill's fate. They know they must go tell Bill's wife. They dread this task because his wife was so proud of Bill, proud of his war record, proud of his fine record as a policeman. She kept all his medals on the wall. They finally go to Bill's apartment. Bill's wife is controlled. She has heard what happened to Bill. She sees the two men are very sorry

[5] THE PHANTOM SHIP by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan. *Collier's*, Sept. 7, 1935.

for her, and feel deeply that Bill should not have died the way he did, killed by a small-time crook. They feel it will wound her pride in him. She says she is prouder than ever of Bill, that any crook—even a little crook—is a deadlier enemy to this country than any enemy Bill got in France. Bill got this crook. She knows, and Bill knew, that was worth dying for. She takes Bill's policeman's shield and pins it on the wall with his other medals. That shield, she declares, is bigger than them all.[6]

The theme of this story, though never stated in words, is nevertheless clear. It is that doing one's every-day duty is more important than spectacular achievements that the world views as the only things worth while. You will see that the character trait of pride has been used in this story also, but in a very different way from that in 6(b) above. It is also a strong build-up of the emotions of admiration and sympathy for Bill's wife, and, to a less degree, for Bill himself. Whenever the material permits, it is always a good plan to get as much emotional value in your short short as you can.

(8). *The story presenting an ironic situation*

This is a popular type of short short, material for it is everywhere, and it is not a particularly difficult type of story to write. An ironic short short is one that presents a situation or sequences of action *the significance or meaning of which is different from what the main character supposes it to be.* Or it may be that a minor character narrator misunderstands the situation that he relates to the reader. The reader likes this very much as it makes him feel clever, since he knows the real significance, or meaning, of the action presented by the story.

(a) A Filipino called Joe, a bank teller in Manila who had been captured by the Japanese and has escaped from them, appears at the American lines. He says he wants to do something for the General. He has been tortured and is in dreadful physical condition. The soldiers take him to the hospital tent. There he tells his story. The Japanese tried to make him tell them where the bank's gold was buried. He refused, though beaten and wounded. Almost dead, he escaped from his captors. After his wounds are dressed someone

[6] MEDALS ON THE WALL by James R. Webb. *Liberty*, June 14, 1941.

asks him, now that he is here, what does he want to do? He replies that he wants to do something for the General.[7]

While this story is placed in a foreign setting and has a war background, the *basic idea* of the story (someone unwittingly does a great service for another) is timeless and a story built from it could be placed in any setting and told against any background.

The story significance, of which Joe is entirely unconscious, is that in all but giving his life to keep secret the hiding-place of the gold, he has rendered the General the greatest possible service. Again in this story you see that strong admiration and sympathy has been built for the main character.

(b) A little American boy is looking forward to seeing the King of England as he passes by in a parade. His head is full of boyish dreams of what a king should look like: wearing spectacular clothes and carrying a sword. When at last the King comes, he is dressed simply, in ordinary clothes such as any business man might wear. The little boy hardly notices him. Following the man in the plain suit and derby the little boy sees the King's guard, a man dressed in scarlet and gold, wearing a sword with a gold tassel. He thinks this man is the King and to the little boy he is all that a King should be. The little boy goes home absolutely satisfied, his dreams fulfilled, as they would not have been had he known that the simply dressed man was really the King.[8]

The irony of this situation is that the little boy was made completely happy by someone who was of no importance at all. The emotion aroused in the reader is one of tender amusement toward the boy, and satisfaction that he was not disappointed.

Analyze the short shorts you read. Train yourself to look for and see the *actual basis of the story,* the *germ idea* from which it was *developed.* Find what the story says, what the story is about. As you do this, vast new storehouses of ideas will open for you. Storehouses of ideas that are in your memory, your own experience. Your eyes will be opened to story ideas and story material in the life about

[7] WHATCHA KNOW, JOE? by Trevor Bardette. *Collier's,* May 9, 1942.
[8] HERE COMES THE KING by Timothy Fuller. *American Magazine,* July 1939.

you. Persevere and you will never again say, "If only I had a good idea for a short short!"

You'll have more good ideas for short shorts than you will ever have time to write.

Method of Study

1. Write the summary of an original short short with a surprise ending.
2. Write the summary of an original short short that is built about the dramatic presentation of a trait of character. Name the trait.
3. Make a list of six other character traits that would, in your opinion, serve as good bases for short shorts.
4. Make a list of six themes that seem promising as foundations for short shorts.
5. Write a summary of an original short short that illustrates one of the themes on your list, and also builds sympathy and admiration for your main character.
6. Write the summary of an original short short that presents an ironic situation.

CHAPTER VIII

How and Where to Get Ideas for Short Shorts

You sometimes hear writers say: "I can't write short shorts." Or, "No idea for a short short ever comes into my mind." Perhaps you too have said that. But a professional writer *can't afford to wait* until an idea for a story comes into his mind. On the contrary, he has consciously worked out a system of *getting ideas,* the specific kind of ideas he wants at the moment. And so can you. Almost before you know it, you will have more ideas than you can ever possibly develop into stories—all kinds of stories.

Let us turn our attention to practical ways of getting ideas from which salable short shorts can be written, and getting these ideas *whenever we want them* and from innumerable sources with ever increasing ease and facility. There is nothing esoteric about any of this. All that is necessary is to follow clearly defined procedures. The only secret is in knowing *where to look for* and *how to develop* short short ideas from these story germs.

IDEAS FROM WITHIN

In your own memories, your own experiences, your own emotions, you have the germ ideas of more stories than you will ever write. In fact, almost all of our story material comes from within. Even though a story you write *seems* to grow from without, that story idea has its roots deep in your character, your experiences, your own attitude toward life. It is molded by your memories, shaped by

your emotions. *No one can write what he does not know, what he does not feel.*

Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that a writer must know *specifically* every detail he writes about. But he must know it fundamentally. The writer who possesses imagination, sensitivity and flexibility can adapt *fundamental knowledge* to almost any specific situation or condition. To illustrate, if a man has never felt love *of any kind,* or *to any degree,* he will be unable to write convincingly about love. Yet if he has ever loved, if he has ever suffered because of this love, he will be able to *imagine* degrees and kinds of love, under many circumstances, in many settings, and in all probability he will be able to convince his readers that he knows what he is writing about.

I once knew a boy who was blind from birth. When he was almost eighteen years of age, an operation gave him normal sight. Before his operation, the dreams of this boy were made entirely of sensory impressions of sound, taste, smell, and touch. Yet after he could see, form, color and motion, combined in many ways outside his actual experience, became part of his dreams. That is to say this could not happen until such reactions *had become part of his conscious experience.* Writers who have not *lived* and *felt* are like this blind boy before the operation; they do not know through their own experience the fundamental realities of life and are, consequently, unable to write about them as applied *specifically.*

This does not mean that a writer must travel to strange corners of the globe, that he must know drug addicts, bank presidents, international spies, barbers, gamblers in order to write about these characters. To be sure if he does know them that may be an advantage, but it is not necessary. What I am emphasizing is, once a writer has known a few people *well,* felt emotion, observed drama of any kind, *he can train himself to transfer* what he has learned to many situations, clothe experience in many a story. *Breadth of understanding and of sympathy are both very important to writers.* The degree to which writers possess these, more than any other single asset, sets the boundaries beyond which their writing talent cannot take them. So spare no pains to increase your sympathy and your understanding whenever and wherever you can, if you desire to become a writer of the significant.

It serves no practical purpose to tell a writer to look within for story ideas, and stop there. He must be shown *how to look within.*

Suppose you sit down with a pencil and paper and send your mind back along the channel of your own past experiences: Look now for interesting people you have known. Not necessarily important people; not necessarily interesting in important ways. When you find such a person write down his name and what it was about him that made him of interest to you. If you can't remember his name —or maybe you never knew it—invent a name for him, one that suits his personality and individualizes him. Now let us look at this person from the standpoint of his possibilities as the nucleus for a short short story.

Let us say he is a farmer who was especially fond of his horses and delighted in a fine buggy and glittering harness. He's a kindly soul. That is your memory. Now let imagination take over: The farmer loses sight of everything else in an overwhelming desire to possess a new set of harness. He sees himself driving up to the next Camp Meeting in much grander style than any other neighbor. His wife is saving the egg money to buy a new dress for the same momentous occasion. It will be only a modest dress as she can't save very much, but having it will mean a great deal to her. Camp Meeting time comes and the farmer doesn't have enough money to buy the new harness. The wife gives up her dream of a new dress and hands her husband the egg money. He takes it and goes to town. He returns to bring, not the harness, but a fine dress; the dress of his wife's dreams, the dress she never expected to have. Here is a short short idea built from a memory of a character. It's material that has a lot of emotion, too.

Perhaps another memory you write down is of a little girl who longed to draw pictures, but all she had to draw with was a black lead pencil. You promised to send her a box of colored pencils, but forgot all about it. Or you may remember a simple, inarticulate man and wife at whose house you stayed one night. They loved each other deeply, but couldn't talk about it. They could only express their feeling for each other by small, almost shamefaced acts of thoughtful kindness. Each of these memories has short short possibilities of the finest kind, because each *appeals strongly to the emo-*

tions. Now look into your own memories and see what you can do in working out short short ideas therefrom.

Next, instead of writing down your memories of people, write down the *experiences you remember.* On the surface, these may seem trivial, unimportant and with no evident story possibilities. But don't discard these memory experiences too quickly. Turn them over in your mind. Give your imagination a chance. *Begin to think creatively.*

Suppose you remember having been riding on a bus when it collided with a truck. It wasn't much of an accident and no one was hurt. Now how can you build a short short out of that memory of an experience? Let's call on your imagination: Suppose the bus caught fire and you were injured—burned or cut, we'll leave that to be decided later. But you were so concerned over getting an injured child to a doctor that you were unmindful of your own condition. You managed, in the face of danger, to carry that child to a village and find a doctor. The doctor discovered at once that you, not the child, was in need of immediate attention. In fact, if you had not made the effort you did in order to save the child, whose injuries were after all only minor, you would have suffered serious consequences yourself. Well, let's make the hero somebody else, and here's an idea for a short short of courage developed from your own memory of a comparatively unimportant accident on the highway.

The two methods given above of *looking within* for short short ideas from a character or a happening are by no means all the methods you may use with excellent results. Settings that have aroused your interest or emotion, bits of dialogue you recall, and so on indefinitely, are rich sources of short short ideas. These ideas, products of your own life, are likely to have the advantage of being fresh and original, since no one else on earth has had exactly your own experiences and, therefore, your own memories. And even if he had, his reactions would not be the same as yours because he would not have your character, your temperament, your attitude toward life, your philosophy.

IDEAS FROM LIFE

The writer need never run out of short short ideas, because life is all about him. And *life is an inexhaustible source of story ideas* of

all kinds. The professional writer *trains himself to see* these ideas and *to develop* them into worth-while stories. To be sure, hard work and conscious effort are required, but the results are achievement and writing success.

It is not necessary that you look for the highly dramatic, the unusual, the bizarre. In fact, it is best not to look for them. Often they result in stories that are trite, or so far removed from reality as to have little or no reader appeal. Instead, look for the simple, emotionally appealing characters, incidents and happenings. Build your story from them, and you'll be more likely to sell it. Never forget that in the end it is the *drama of the every day* that is most appealing to the reader—the every day that is his own life with the drama in it that is unsuspected by him.

As an example, let us take an incident from life, a quite simple incident, and see if we can build a short short idea from it. One night I attended the theatre. In front of the building, a bent old woman, shabbily dressed, was selling unusually lovely corsages. The contrast between the old woman and her flowers, and the gay, well-dressed crowd going into the theatre caught my attention and moved me emotionally. That was all there was to the incident.

Now what can be done with this from the standpoint of evolving from it a short short idea for a story? From now on we must draw on our imagination: Each time a young man buys a corsage for his girl, or a young man, evidently very much alone, passes by, from the basket at her side the old woman takes a single flower and slips it in his lapel button-hole. She asks each of these young men to write to her. Through the years she has received letters from many strange places all over the world. She has treasured them all even keeping the envelopes. Then her own son, who went away years before and never wrote, although he shares her interest in stamps, returns broken in health and without money. The old woman, by the collection of the stamps from the letters received from her "boys," is able to start her son in the business of stamp collecting.

Perhaps you will develop the story from this incident quite differently. The result will be yet another story from the same basic idea, because *every idea has numerous facets of story drama.* But the above serves to illustrate the general method of getting short short ideas from life, even from the most trivial and momentary happen-

ings. A more intrinsically dramatic incident may or may not serve as well as a basis for a short short idea. Why? Because the ultimate result will depend on how much the original happening, episode or incident *touched* you; that is, *moved you emotionally,* and the extent to which that emotion *activated your imagination.*

Another valuable source of short short ideas in life itself is the almost constant stream of situations and characters we contact in our every-day living. These pass by us in a kaleidoscopic review, but we do not see them as possible short short ideas until we *train* ourselves to look consciously for their *potential values* to us as professional writers. Just as an artist sees color values in the simplest scene, colors that the layman looking at the same scene never sees, so the trained writer *sees story values* where the untrained writer sees no drama, or, at most, a momentary flash of passing interest.

Let us first examine simple situations for their story value. I do not mean now that we shall take a situation and develop it into either a plotted story or a planned story, with causes that work themselves out in results. Many interesting and moving short shorts are nothing more than the presentation of a situation that is intrinsically interesting and emotionally appealing, and rises to some kind of climax, dramatic or emotional.

To illustrate, let me briefly synopsize a successful short short of this type that was published in a top smooth-paper magazine, unfortunately I have forgotten when and where:

> The setting was a city in Spain; the time, during the Spanish war. A young soldier, blinded in battle, had returned to the city where a year and a half before he had met, loved and married a beautiful café dancer, especially skillful with the castanets. Though Spanish cities were in ruins, their inhabitants scattered or killed, he was searching for his wife and infant son. When asked how he would find his wife when he could not see, the soldier answered, "Ah, sir, you forget the castanets."

As you see, this is a situation, nothing more: the situation of a blind young man courageously searching for his loved ones, with no real chance that he will ever find them—alive or dead. Yet the story held reader interest because of its strong emotional appeal. The reader was moved to feel admiration and sympathy for the

courageous young man who would not admit defeat even though faced by overwhelming odds.

It is not necessary that the emotion aroused in the reader by a "situation" story be of any single or specific kind. It may be infinite in its variety—a "light" emotion, such as amusement; or, a deep, almost overwhelming emotion—say of pity. What must be remembered, however, when writing a story of the "situation" type, is that whatever the emotion the story is intended to arouse in the reader, *that emotion must be aroused to the highest possible degree.* A "situation" story that is planned to arouse the emotions of sympathy or pity or admiration must arouse them strongly. No half-way measures will do.

If a "situation" story is planned to arouse the emotion of amusement, then the story must be very amusing indeed. The story of the young man who struck his wife as summarized in Chapter VI is a good illustration of this.

As you see, this story is no more than an amusing situation organized and presented in an entertaining manner. It takes both knowledge and skill on the part of the writer to do this. But knowledge can be acquired by study; skill can be attained by practice. Most amusing situations, most dramatic situations, most emotional situations can be successfully presented in the short short form, *when a writer knows the fundamental principles of reader interest and of story organization.*

Now a practical exercise in developing a short short idea from a situation: Since, other things being equal, it is more difficult to arouse and hold reader interest with a light emotion than a strong emotion, let us try to think of a situation we have observed that is potentially or actually strong in its emotional appeal. Just to make it harder, let us think of a simple situation that has, at most, a weak emotional value. Here is a common one: Most of us know or have heard of a boy, sixteen or thereabouts, who passionately longs to become an airplane pilot. He is a born flier and all his thoughts and hopes are wrapped up in this longing. Now what can we do with this material? How can we build an idea for a "situation" short short from this? Numberless ways, of course. Let's try one and see how it works out.

The emotional situation we imagine is this: The young boy is the son of parents who have only money enough for necessities. There

is none to pay for the boy's training. When the story opens, the boy has been working at an airfield every hour he can spare from school and has taken his pay in instruction in flying. Most of his work has been as a mechanic. To be sure, he has learned a great deal about that end of keeping planes in the air, but to him it is only a means to attain his goal—flying. The day arrives when he is to make his first solo. An hour before time to take his plane up, a flying piece of steel from a lathe, on which he was working in the machine shop, destroyed the sight of one eye. Now he can never hope to be a flyer. Weeks later we see him watch his buddy, who has worked beside him during their months of training, take a ship up for his first solo. Turning away, our hero goes back to the machine shop, and bravely takes up the only work he can ever do connected with flying—that of keeping planes in flying condition. The emotions aroused by such a story are sympathy and admiration.

IDEAS FROM NEWSPAPER ITEMS

Any newspaper you may pick up is certain to have at least one item that has possibilities as a short short idea. And most newspapers have many more. As long as newspapers are published writers need never lack for short short ideas. All that is necessary is that the writer *learn to recognize* short short possibilities in news items.

There are two kinds of newspaper items from which short short ideas may spring: *Big news stories on the front page, and small human interest items on the back pages.* These last offer, as a rule, the richest gleanings for the alert writer. However, neither source should be overlooked.

The big stories on the front pages are usually so filled with facts that they leave little or nothing to the imagination of the writer. After most big nation-wide news stories have been published, editors are flooded with stories that are little if anything more than the story as it actually happened draped in a thin veil of fiction. Needless to say such stories do not sell. One reason, big news stories are so dramatic in themselves that attempts to fictionize them are less dramatic than the original happening. Of course there are exceptions to this, but it is wiser to leave this type of story to the trained, professional writer. Their requirements are generally too difficult for a beginner; the pitfalls inherent in the material too many.

In the case of the small, personal-interest items tucked in the back pages, the case is entirely different. These are usually not complete stories at all. Their value to the writer is their power to *arouse* his interest, his emotion, and cause him to ask questions that only his imagination can answer. The stories he *evolves* from these items are certain to be fresh and original, because the items will not affect anyone else in exactly the same way as they affect him. Nor will the imagination of any other writer give the same answers to the questions asked, even if the questions are the same—which is highly unlikely. Hence, when at a loss for an idea for a short short, don't overlook the small items in the back pages of your newspaper.

Let us see how this works out: I open today's paper and cast my eyes down the columns of the back pages. No doubt I skip over many items that will suggest stories to other people, but since they seem without possibilities to me, I read on. Suddenly I stop at a two-inch item. The headline reads: BANDIT GETS $225 IN HOSPITAL HOLD-UP. Hospitals aren't held up very often, so the fact has the advantage of furnishing an unusual setting. The bandit, the item goes on to say, held up the night clerk.

Now what shall we do with this? First, the bandit must not get away with the $225 because readers do not like to have criminals succeed. Second, it isn't sufficiently dramatic to have the night clerk robbed. The bandit must attempt to rob a patient who is very ill, practically helpless. This makes the odds very much in favor of the bandit, and instantly makes possible the building of suspense, and fear in the reader that the villain will succeed in stealing the money from the helpless patient to whom the money means much. The bandit, when at the point of succeeding, of course, fails. And is captured because, we shall say tentatively, of his ignorance of hospital conditions. Result? We have a typical Biter-Bit short short idea, in an unusual setting, developed from a two-inch newspaper item.

Suppose we look for another item, preferably one entirely different from the one given above. We scan a few more columns, again no doubt passing over many splendid potential stories. We stop at this item: SIX OF LAST MAN CLUB, AGE 94 TO 101, TO MEET TOMORROW. We feel admiration for these courageous old men, who in spite of their age and many infirmities, still meet once a year determined to continue until only one man remains. Then he will open that last bottle

of wine, treasured for many years, and drink the last toast to all the others who have passed on.

This is an item with many possibilities, all potentially strong emotionally. But since we have space to develop but one idea, let's start our imagination and see what happens: We decide to use the last man as the hero of our story. All the others have died. Ever since the club was organized, back in his lusty youth, he has dreamed of being the last man, the man to drink the last toast to all his dead companions. Now his ambition, his dream, is about to be realized. It is the culmination of his life, his moment of greatest achievement. The great night arrives, the date on which the Last Man Club has always met. The old man's grandson takes him to the hall in his car. It is to be a festive occasion, with the mayor and other prominent people present to take part and honor the old man. As the old man crosses the street holding the arm of his grandson to steady his footsteps, a drunken driver heads straight for a woman waiting in the safety zone for a street car. The old man jerks free, pushes the woman aside and is struck himself. He knows he is about to die, that he will never drink the toast to his fellow club-members. But he does not mind. What he did do, his saving the life of a woman, was much more important and gives him much more satisfaction than achieving his life-long ambition to drink the last toast of the Last Man Club.

Properly organized and written, the story indicated by the above summary would be salable in many markets. Or, from this same news item you might develop an entirely different story, equally emotional, equally salable.

Never again need you be at a loss for a short short idea. Practice using these methods of getting such ideas. Any one of them, followed with intelligence and determination, will quickly furnish one or more sound germ ideas for short shorts.

Nor are these the only methods productive of results. You will find, as you work along these lines, methods of your own that work especially well *for you. Keep an open mind.* Make yourself as sensitive to story ideas as a photographic film is sensitive to light. *Story ideas are all about you.* The task of the beginning writer is to train himself to *see* these ideas; then learn to *develop, organize,* and

present them so that the result is a story of absorbing interest to the reader.

Still other important ways of getting short short ideas will be discussed in Chapter XIX How to Read Short Shorts for Technique.

Method of Study

1. Plan an original short short having for its main character someone you have known who had an interesting character trait.
2. Think of a recent incident in your own life and develop a short short from it.
3. Develop a short short from a newspaper item.

Part III

PRESENTATION OF THE SHORT SHORT

CHAPTER IX

Structure of the Short Short

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the structure of a story may be compared to the floor-plan, foundation, walls and roof of a house. Conditioned and influenced though these are by the architecture of the house, they are constant structural units that appear in every building, of whatever kind it may be and for whatever use it may be intended.

The constant structural units that appear in every story, with the exception of a negligible few "experimental" stories, are:

The Beginning
The Body
The End
The Complete Scene

Since these units are so universally used and so necessary to the salable story, it is only common sense for the writer to learn *what they are* and *how to use them* to the best advantage. At times their use in the short short differs from that employed in the long short. Hence it is important that the writer know *what these differences are* and *how to use them to advantage.*

BEGINNING, BODY AND END

First, we shall consider these structural units together, since each is closely connected with the other. Later we shall examine them separately.

The most insistent complaint of editors concerning the stories submitted to them by any except professional writers is that the creators

of these stories are totally oblivious of the fact that a story *must* have a Beginning, a Body and an End. You can only be sure your story has a Beginning, a Body and an End by *planning it that way.* In order to plan it that way you must know the requirements of each of these *structural units. When you know what you must do,* the job of doing it is more than half done.

Following the analogy between building a story and building a house a little further, the Beginning may be compared to the floor-plan and foundation, the Body to the walls and partitions erected on that foundation, and the End to the roof. As you see, there can be nothing in the building of a house that has not been prepared for in the floor-plan and foundation. If you will remember this when you are planning and writing your story Beginning, you will do a much better job, not only of writing the Beginning, but of writing the whole story. And the editor who reads your story will have no cause to say, "This fellow doesn't yet know that a story must have a Beginning, a Body and an End!"

I. THE BEGINNING

1. *Choice of Title*

The Beginning of your story starts with your title, even though you may not decide on a title until after your story is completed. Suppose we look quickly at the main requirements of a good title:

First, *it should attract the reader's interest.* A title is the writer's first step in "selling" his story to the reader, so be sure your story title is a good one. Now, what is a "good" title?

A good title is one that *makes* the reader *want to read* the story that follows.

What is the easiest emotion to arouse in the reader that will make him want to read a story?

The emotion of curiosity.

That is the test to apply to your short short titles. If the reaction to *that test is negative,* do not use that title. If it is strongly positive, you have a good title, provided it isn't too long, or has some other obvious handicap.

A title should be as short as possible and still keep its curiosity-arousing qualities. Sometimes a title as long as six or even seven words is used for a short short. But not often.

If you can, get the feeling of action in your titles. But don't try too hard to do this. There can be more important qualities in a title than merely action. For example the title "That Guy Wonzer" does not directly suggest action, but it distinctly arouses curiosity about Wonzer. On the other hand, the title, "The Sheriff Takes A Ride" does suggest action and at the same time arouses curiosity as to what happened on the ride.

Never allow your title to give away the end of your story. The function of a title is to *arouse curiosity, not satisfy it.* The reader reads a story for two purposes: His primary purpose is to find out what happened in the end. If you tell your reader in your title what happens, there is no reason for him to read your story, *unless* the main interest of your story is not in what happened, but in *how it happened.* Even in that case, you are not to take a chance on *telling* the reader the outcome of your story in the title. Wait until you have his interest securely hooked by a curiosity-arousing paragraph or two. Beginners and semi-professional writers often use such uninteresting titles as "Susan Succeeds," or "The Wanderer Comes Home." It is easy to change such titles. For instance, while not especially brilliant, the titles that follow are more productive of curiosity than the ones above: "Dream On, Susan" and "The Road Home."

If you possibly can, have your *title express the very heart,* the significance of your story.

Don't worry if the perfect title for your story doesn't come to you along with the story idea. The best titles are sometimes found in the story itself after it is completed. You will often find a word or a phrase in the story that is a perfect title. Only recently I was working with a student on a story for which neither of us was able to devise a title we liked. Finally, in the last revision this phrase appeared, "beauty to remember." This was the right title for the story, *expressing its significance.* The student then "wrote the title into" the story so that it became a *unifying force.* By using it in the opening paragraph, twice in the Body and once in the closing paragraph, it put the finishing touch to the story.

2. Story Beginning

Now to the Beginning of the story proper: In this Beginning the writer should introduce *all his main characters.* In a short short this is easy, since there will not be many because of word limitations. At the outset *make the story situation absolutely clear to the reader.* In other words, you must put the reader in possession of the *facts out of which* the Body and End will develop: the *opening crisis,* hero's (Actor A) *problem,* and *plant* the *means* by which he will solve it. Also you will *stress the menace* of the villain force (Actor B). If the short short will have a Surprise Ending, that surprise must be deftly planted in the story's Beginning. Everything of importance in the story must be *prepared for* in the story's Beginning. For example, if you introduce an important character or factor for the first time in the Body or End, the reader gets an unpleasant shock. He has to readjust his whole idea of what the story is about, and he doesn't like to do that. Furthermore, such a procedure makes a story unconvincing and destroys its unity. Remember, you are *building your foundation,* laying out your floor-plan here in the Beginning. You can't add a room, or even a closet later without botching the whole building job. In the story Beginning you not only tell the reader facts, but you show those character traits that will later work themselves out in the Body and in the End.

If your story has a theme—and most short shorts have a theme—it should be made clear here, or the foundation laid for its later clarification—depending on the material of the story. If an object will play an important part later, plant that object in the Beginning, so the reader will know about it.

In a long short story the Beginning is usually not longer than one-fourth the total length of the story, and is often much shorter than that. The only exception to this is when the DECISION pattern is used. In this case the Beginning takes up the greater part of the story. But in a short short the Beginning is *often very long* in proportion to the Body and End. This is because in some short shorts the story is almost all situation and it takes some time to present that situation. Once placed before the reader, the situation is swiftly resolved and brought to a climax and an end. Never forget that the *material at all times determines the treatment it requires.* Of course

there are many short shorts that have Beginnings that are no longer than one or two brief paragraphs.

II. THE BODY

In the Body of the short short, no matter how comparatively long or short it may be, the situation outlined in the Beginning is developed to a logical, in fact *an inevitable peak of dramatic* and emotional *interest*. The emotional material, whatever its nature, should rise in tension, and this tension should be carried over into the End. The moment this tension is released the story is over, so far as the reader is concerned, and he rapidly loses interest.

Never actually bring your story to an end in the Body. If you do, the end will be an anti-climax and you will not sell your story. *Save your sharpest emotional reaction* for the End, *preferably the last line,* if that is at all possible. Don't tell the reader everything in the Body, don't explain everything. Keep the reader guessing as to the significance of the action he sees, the dialogue he hears, and so on. Keep him reading by *continually building in him* the emotions of curiosity and of suspense. If your story is mainly one of an emotional effect, keep the emotion rising to the highest possible point and make that point sharply defined; don't allow it to be softly rounded in its contours. Keep the reader wondering.

III. THE END

The End of your short short should be as brief as you can possibly make it. The Beginning and Body are where the story is *told.* The End is where the story is brought to a close, its significance revealed, its emotions raised to the greatest intensity and climaxed. Too many words will dull the effect. Here words should be used as if each one cost you five dollars and you had no money to spare.

The last line, or possibly lines, of your short short are every bit as important as your title and should be given at least as much thought. Of course, they may practically write themselves in the first draft, but this doesn't often happen. Usually, these closing lines are worked out carefully, written and rewritten. Last lines are like the knock-out punch in the prize ring. No matter how well the fight has gone, it isn't won until the final knock-out punch is delivered.

Study published short shorts for their last lines. Some will be

better than others. *Try to see exactly what qualities the best last lines have that make them outstandingly effective.* Try to see how the others failed to make the top grade. All this will help you to make the last lines of your own short shorts fully as good as the best.

IV. THE COMPLETE SCENE

The structural unit known as the Complete Scene is the *foundation unit of all dramatic writing,* whatever its form or length. It is the first step in writing a story and sometimes in the short short field it *is a story,* no other material being needed. The Complete Scene is made up of five steps, and each of these five steps may be used advantageously anywhere in a story, separately or as a part of a fragment of a scene. An understanding of the Complete Scene and skill in the use of its five steps is incalculably important to every writer. Even writers of non-fiction will find it most useful in adding drama and hence interest to their work.

The five steps of the Complete Scene are:

Step 1. *Meeting,* or coming together of the characters in the scene.
" 2. *Conversation.*
" 3. *Purpose* of Actor A for the Scene, either stated or implied. (2 and 3 are often combined)
" 4. *Conclusive Act.*
" 5. *Plot Step.* The summing up of the significance of the scene, or the result of the action as it applied to the plot unfoldment is called a *Plot Step.*

We shall examine these Five Steps of the Complete Scene in detail later. Now for a moment, let us look at the Complete Scene as a whole.

Every Complete Scene is a little story in itself. It is always a pattern story that follows one of the Purpose patterns. In the beginning of a Complete Scene the chief actor for that scene, who may or may not be the chief actor for the story as a whole, has a *Purpose* he is determined to accomplish. There can be no dramatic scene until two or more people meet, people with opposing desires, wills, purposes. *Clash is a necessary ingredient of the dramatic scene.* It is not enough to show someone wanting something and getting it; there *must be opposition* and that opposition must be logically overcome by the

main character, or he must fail to overcome it. For example, if Mary says, "John, I want that book you are reading." And John says, as he hands it to her, "Very well, Mary," that is not a dramatic scene, because there has been no clash. There has been only a conversational interchange. But if Mary asks for the book and John refuses, and Mary on her part tells John what a brute he is, or throws an ash tray at him or, after glaring at him, stalks out of the room, we have a clash.

Conversation is a necessary ingredient of the dramatic scene, because *it is necessary to dramatic presentation.* Without conversation, presentation is necessarily in narrative form. You are *telling* the reader in narrative what happened, instead of *showing* the reader in a scene what happened. And telling is never as dramatic as showing.

A Complete Scene must build to a climax. Some definite result must be accomplished by the action of the scene. Either Actor A has succeeded in achieving his purpose for the scene, or he has failed. And that success or failure is clearly apparent to the reader, as well as the significance of the result of the scene in relation to the plot.

Now let us look at a Complete Scene, from which all non-essentials have been removed so that its structural elements, or Steps, may be clearly seen and the function of each observed.

Step 1. *Meeting*

> Dan (Actor A for the Scene) stood at the door of the gay little restaurant, impatiently waiting for Ellie to arrive. Ah! There she was at last. He watched her step from the cab, pay the driver, and then walk quickly towards him.

Step 2. *Conversation*

> "Hello, Dan," Ellie said brightly. "Don't look so cross. I'm only fifteen minutes late."
>
> "And that's just fifteen minutes I can't spend with you," Dan said. "I have only an hour for lunch."
>
> A few minutes later they were seated at a small table and Dan was ordering for both. As soon as the waitress had gone Dan leaned across the table.

Step 3. *Purpose of Actor A for the Scene*

"Ellie," he said, "please don't go to California for the summer. Stay here and marry me. We've been engaged for a long time. I've just had a raise—"

"Why, Dan Blackburn!" Ellie's eyes were round with hurt surprise. "How can you be so selfish! I'll never get another chance to spend a summer in California and I've wanted to go there all my life—"

Dan broke in eagerly, "I'll take you to California."

"When?" Ellie demanded. "On our honeymoon—if I'll stay and marry you right away?"

"Well—I couldn't go that soon. But maybe next summer—"

Ellie shook her head. "If you won't take me this summer, I'm going anyway."

"Please, Ellie—"

"Don't try to argue me out of it, Dan. I'm going!"

Step 4. *Conclusive Act*

Dan spread his big hands on the table in a gesture of defeat. The waitress returned and set their soup in front of them. Dan sipped his without interest, unconscious of what he was doing.

Step 5. *Plot Step*

Ellie didn't love him enough to give up one summer's pleasure for his sake. He loved her as much as ever, but he suddenly knew he would never marry her. . . . He didn't want to any more.

Now let us look at the Steps of the above Complete Scene and see what each one accomplishes:

In Step 1, Dan, who is *Actor A for the Scene* because it is he who has a Purpose for the Scene, *is introduced first.* It is not *necessary* that Actor A be introduced first, but it is good practice when the material permits, for the same reason that the main character should be introduced first in a story. *The character who is introduced first in a story or a scene immediately becomes of first importance to the reader.* If later that importance must be shifted to another character

with the resulting switch of reader-attention, it tends to weaken the unity of the story.

Ellie, the secondary character is introduced and through Dan's eyes we see her walk towards him.

In Step 2, Dan and Ellie are characterized by their *conversation* and the beginnings of the situation given, as well as setting, time and place.

In Step 3, Dan states his *Purpose for the Scene* briefly and plainly: His purpose is to persuade Ellie to give up her trip to California and marry him at once. In the conversation that follows clash develops and rises to a climax where Ellie declares she will not give up her plan to go to California at once. Therefore, Dan has *failed* to accomplish his Purpose for the Scene.

In Step 4, we see the *Conclusive* Act, *showing by action* that Dan has been defeated. Dan makes a gesture of defeat.

In Step 5, we have the *summing up* of the significance of Ellie's refusal to give up her trip and marry Dan and we see the effect of this on Dan, which in turn will of necessity affect the plot of the story. *This is clearly a plot step of crisis, a turning-point in the plot.* From here on the story will unfold otherwise than it would have if Ellie had acted differently, or if Ellie's action had had a different effect on Dan. In this Plot Step the reader is *told all this.* He isn't left to surmise it; or to think it might possibly be so; or, what is more likely, to miss the significance of the scene entirely.

Plot Steps do the reader's thinking for him. The reader, interested in the story, eager to find out what happens next, cannot be expected to stop and weigh what has happened in the scene, or what has happened in the story up to any given point, or to discover its significance to the progress of the plot. You, the writer, must do this for him. And the means by which you do it is a skillful use of Plot Steps.

Note: The use of the Plot Step is not confined to the end of Complete Scenes. They may be put in a story at any point where, without it, the reader might miss the significance of any sequence or even any single act as it relates to the plot. *The Plot Step is one of the most important single literary devices at the disposal of the writer to make his story clear and effective,* whether that story is a long short or a short short.

Watch for Plot Steps in the stories you read. When you find one, see what it *does for the story*. Untrained writers often put Plot Steps in their stories by accident and quite unconsciously. Trained writers *consciously plan* Plot Steps for their stories, putting them in where they are needed and writing them so that they do exactly what the writer wants them to do and in the *most effective way*. The skill to do this comes only with practice. It doesn't come from wishing for it. So strive to learn where Plot Steps are needed and how to write them. Then practice and practice!

Method of Study

1. What are the two main structural units of the short story?
2. Where does the Beginning of a story start?
3. What are the functions of the Beginning? The Body? The End?
4. Give three original story titles and state the reasons why you think each is a good title.
5. Write a Complete Scene, indicating each Step in the Scene.

CHAPTER X

Format of the Short Short

THE problems of format that face the writer of short shorts are similar to those with which the writer of long shorts must deal. Yet they are solved somewhat differently because of the differences between the long short and the short short form.

The format of a story may be compared to the period of architecture of a house. The architect must decide upon the type of architecture he will follow in building a certain house *before he can plan* the structural lines of the house. If the house is to be Southern Colonial in its form, then the floor plan, foundation, walls and roof, in other words, its structure, will differ from that of the house of English Tudor, Early New England, or the California bungalow type. *Structure is conditioned by format,* don't you forget that!

That is why, when we are planning a short short, we must consider structure.

FORMAT

The format of a story is the form in which it is cast; the way in which it is told. There is literally no end to the number of formats that may be used. New, original formats are devised from time to time by writers who have thought of a different way in which to tell their story. It is not easy to find editors or readers who will accept very strange forms, though it is accomplished from time to time. However it is well to remember that editors and readers are accustomed to certain formats. They know them, know what to expect from them and so they accept them and prefer them. In other words,

readers are trained to read stories written in those formats. When a story with a new format comes along, it has to make its way, against opposition, as it were. And of course, because it is new, it is not necessarily a good format. New formats are like the familiar little girl in the poem who when she was good, was very, very good, and when she was bad she was horrid.

I advise you by all means to experiment with a new format, if you think of one; but don't be surprised if the resulting story doesn't sell. Why? Because a completely new format is a surprise, and not always a pleasant one to the editor or to the reader. The writer who uses an entirely untried format is in the same position as a song writer who composes his music with an unfamiliar rhythm and emphasis. His song *may* get on the *Hit Parade,* but it isn't *likely* that it will. Of course, one can always take a chance. *Artists should experiment with the new.* And remember that writers are artists, too.

Now let us take a look at the formats most used for short shorts. They are eight in number and I have divided them for easier study into the following three categories: The Dependables, the Undependables, and the Practically Impossibles.

I. THE DEPENDABLES

There are two of these, the chronological format and the flashback format. I call them dependables, because they are by far the most frequently used formats in all types of magazines, even the so-called "literary" magazines where the different, the original, the startling are most sought after.

1. *THE CHRONOLOGICAL FORMAT:* A story told in this fashion relates the story happenings *in the order of their occurrence.* One or more brief flashbacks are allowed in order to acquaint the reader with what happened before the story action actually started, but are by no means always used. More often the information is presented in narrative form, or in dialogue.

(a) *Example of presenting information concerning past events in narrative form:*

John rode toward the shore of the lake. He could see Mary waiting for him there. John watched her anxiously. He knew she must be remembering, as he was, that March day almost a year ago.

Laughing, reckless Alec had gone out on the lake alone. A sudden storm had come up, black and wild, lashing the water into furious waves. Alec's boat must have capsized. Hours later his lifeless body had drifted to this very beach. John wondered why Mary had asked to meet him here.

(b) *Example of presenting information in a brief flashback:*

John rode toward the shore of the lake. He could see Mary waiting for him there. John watched her anxiously. She must be remembering, as he was, that March day almost a year ago. Half a dozen young people had accompanied Alec to the little wharf where his speed boat was tied. "Hi, fellows!" Alec had cried. "Let's go for a spin around the lake!" But no one had accepted his invitation. Instead, they'd tried to get him to give up the idea. They'd pointed out the clouds gathering along the mountain peaks. But he wouldn't listen. Calling good-natured taunts, Alec had pushed off. Half an hour later the storm came, black and wild, lashing the water furiously. Alec, alone in a smother of wind and water, had used every device of seamanship he knew. But he was helpless. As the boat went over, the steering wheel had struck Alec on the head. Hours later his lifeless body was washed up on this very beach. Now as John rode on he wondered why Mary had asked to meet him here.

(c) *Example of presenting information in dialogue:*

John rode toward the shore of the lake. He could see Mary waiting for him there. In another moment he had dismounted and was walking by her side.

"John," Mary said, "do you remember what happened a year ago today?"

"Yes," he nodded, "we couldn't stop him. Alex was always daring, reckless. He would go out on the lake in that speed boat of his, even though he could see a storm was coming up."

"It must have been dreadful for him," Mary went on. "So far from shore—and all that wind. What do you suppose really happened?"

"The boat must have capsized," John said gently. "Remember that bruise on his forehead? Something probably struck him as it went over."

"And then," Mary almost whispered, "we found him here. Oh, John, I can't forget that! I can't!"

The chronological format is especially suited to the short short because it is the simplest, most straightforward way of telling a story. As has been said before, the ideal short short has a time lapse of one

hour or less and takes place in one setting. Such a story demands the chronological format.

2. *THE FLASHBACK FORMAT:* This is the format to use when *most of your story takes place in the distant past.* It is increasingly popular in both the short short and the long short field, and may be seen in some of our best modern novels, movies and radio dramas, for instance in the short stories of Ursula Parrott, and in both the novel and screen version of Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca.* It requires, of course, a *specific type of material. The flashback format permits the use of material with a long time lapse;* so long that it could not ordinarily be made into a short story at all. It also offers a device whereby literary material can be used that starts slowly and is, consequently, difficult to make interesting at once. For these reasons the professionally minded writer will do well to study carefully the flashback format, learn to recognize material suited to it and master its technique.

The flashback story *begins with the final crisis of the story.* Because it begins in this important and dramatic crisis, it at once gets reader interest, arouses reader emotion. Once that is accomplished, and strong reader curiosity aroused as to what happened in the past, the writer arranges a little pause in the action and, with the aid of a smooth transition, takes the reader back to the time when the story actually begins. This may be hours, days, weeks, months, even years before the time in which the story opens. *The story then unfolds dramatically, as if it were happening before the reader's eyes.* When the story is brought up to the point in the first scene where the reader was taken into the distant past, again by a smooth transition the reader is brought back into that scene. The story is then quickly ended.

Three important points to remember about the flashback format are these:

(1) In the first part of the story, present the story situation and arouse the greatest possible curiosity about *what happened in that distant past.*

(2) While telling what happened in the past, build curiosity and suspense as to *what will happen in the end.*

(3) Be sure not to tell the reader everything and *not have everything interesting* happen in the flashback. Leave something dramatic,

something significant to happen *after* you have brought your reader out of the flashback and are very near the end of your story.

Watch for published flashback stories, especially short shorts. When you find one, analyze it carefully for technique. See *exactly* how the writer secured his effects and made his transitions. Note the kind of material used. File the story for reference. Keep your eyes, your heart, your imagination, open for flashback material. If you will do these things you should have little, if any, trouble in writing a sound, interesting short short in the flashback format.

II. THE UNDEPENDABLES

These are the formats that are rare, tricky, hard to use, require unusual material, and for which editors feel no natural enthusiasm. If you are to sell an editor a story written in one of these formats you not only must write a good story, you have to write an *exceptionally good* story, because you have to overcome editorial prejudice. It can be done, it *is* done with reasonable frequency in the literary magazines that pay off in much prestige and, unfortunately, little money. Rarely do we find these formats in the top big-paying magazines. In the *secondary markets* of all kinds the Undependables and the Practically Impossibles are never seen, so don't waste your time writing them for these last-named publications.

Now let us see what these Undependables are:

1. *THE STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS FORMAT:* In this format the story passes through the mind of the narrator in the form of thoughts. In other words, he *remembers* what happened, and sometimes he forecasts what will happen in the immediate future *as a result* of what happened in the past.

It requires the greatest skill to make a story of this type sufficiently interesting to induce any editor to buy it. Either the story itself must be highly dramatic and so overcome to some extent the lack of drama in the way it is told, or its style of presentation must be so outstanding that the reader is held by that alone. Or the characters must be so lifelike and appealing that they hold the reader.

Most material that is suited to the stream-of-consciousness format can be told—and more interestingly told—by using the flashback format, which makes dramatic and emotional effects so much easier

to achieve. Both formats require material that is in the distant past, with only a brief hold on the immediate past, the time in which most stories are cast.

Since we have to deal so much in this chapter with time and time lapse used in stories, let us pause for a moment to stress the four divisions of time that we recognize and must deal with in writing:

(a) The *distant* past of completed action.
(b) The *immediate* past.
(c) The *present.*
(d) The *future.*

They are expressed as follows: She had come, she came, she comes, she will come.

The fact that someone is remembering, or thinking the story moves its drama one step farther from the reader than if the story were being told and shown to the reader directly. Anything that comes *between the reader and the drama of a story* lessens the reader's interest. Of course, once in a great while, you will read a stream-of-consciousness story that holds reader interest from start to finish; one that the reader feels could have been written in no other way. If you have such a story in mind, by all means go ahead and write it. Many of the stories of William Saroyan are outstanding examples. But there are few Saroyans.

2. *THE ALL-NARRATIVE FORMAT.* Short shorts using this format are by no means rare. Narration is the most compact form of writing, much more so than dramatic writing which requires scenes with dialogue and action. You can cover tremendous events and years of time in one paragraph of narration. But the trouble with narration is that it tends to become monotonous in that usually it is not dramatic or vivid. Narration continued for any length of time, unless it is written by someone who knows the technique of writing live, interesting dramatic narration, is deadly dull. The way to write readable, even thrilling narration will be given in detail in Chapter XII. Writers must *learn* to write dramatic narrative and it is not easy.

If you hope to hold your reader with an all-narrative format you must make your narration *move.* There must be life, sparkle, action in it. It should be packed with sensory appeal; sounds, colors, tastes, smells—all your material will permit. You must choose words that

are pictorial, have action. And don't forget emotion. Keep your reader *feeling* all the time. Make even the breeze that stirs the treetops a sinister breeze that threatens danger or a cool breeze that promises pleasure. Don't just let it be a breeze, with no emotional stimulus of any kind. *Let there be clash, variety, suspense in your narration.* Don't let it stop like a stalled automobile. It may go slowly for a space, then it may go fast, but never let it stop. Narration loves to stop. It loves to go off on tangents, to bring in extraneous material, to go on and on about nothing like a garrulous old woman. Remember, *only words that move your story forward* are worth anything. All other words, no matter how beautiful you may think them, are nothing more than dead weight.

3. *PRESENT-TENSE FORMAT:* Stories told in the present tense are not often published, but more short shorts of this type are seen than long shorts. The reason is obvious: Telling a magazine story in the present tense is such a completely impossible situation that the reader can't be made to believe in it very long. However, if the writer is very clever and has a real story the reader will accept such presentation for a little while.

For some obscure reason, most of these present-tense stories, though not all, are in the first person. That increases the unreality of the whole thing. The reader is expected to believe that while the narrator is suffering, struggling, all but dying for love of his darling Arabella, even talking to her, he is at the same time relating his story. It's too much. Nevertheless, occasionally it is done. And who knows, you might want to do it yourself sometime.

This is approximately the way such a story goes:

> I sit at my window watching Arabella come up the walk. She rings the bell. I go to the door. I say, "Why Arabella darling, what brings you here?" She smiles sadly. "Oscar," she says, her sweet lips trembling, "I've been a naughty, naughty girl. Can you ever forgive me?" I take her in my eager arms. "Of course, pet," I whisper in her ear. She kisses me.

Terrible, isn't it? But it's one way of writing a short short, so you should learn how it's done—even if, as is to be hoped, you never do it.

Of course, in justice it must be said that this format is generally

used for stories of comedy that make no pretense of creating a sense of reality. Used in this way the format can be effective. But as a way of writing serious stories it does not work out so well.

Too, there is the strange story of a character so peculiar, so eccentric, or so uneducated that he always talks in the present tense. His use of the present tense on all occasions is supposed to individualize him. These methods are all right if you can get away with them. But the Present-Tense Format is decidedly one of the Undependables, so far as helping you to sell your story is concerned.

4. *LETTERS, DIARIES, TELEGRAMS*—whole or in part: At long—very long—intervals short shorts using one of these forms are published. Is it worth taking the chance? Not unless you have a very clever, fresh and original idea that can be put over in no other way. Even then, the odds are very much against you. These means of telling a story remove the drama from the reader, and that removal *steps the drama down to almost nothing.* The whole load of getting and holding reader interest is thus placed on the *presentation* of the story. Of course you'll try it; every writer does, sooner or later. I sincerely hope you'll sell your story. But, personally, I always hold it is a lazy way to tell a story.

III. IMPOSSIBLES

These are formats that I have seen used, but they are so intractable, so limiting, and used so seldom that they are really Impossibles, so far as the ordinary writer is concerned.

1. *ALL DIALOGUE:* I have in my files less than half a dozen short shorts using this format. They have all been written by two men in collaboration. I don't wonder it took two men to write them, and, in my opinion, the result wasn't worth the effort. They are like radio programs with mechanical voices, and no sound effects, or music. It may be possible to tell a significant, or even an interesting or amusing story in this way, but I have not yet seen one. Those in my files were, I think, printed as literary curiosities, not for their intrinsic interest to the reader *as stories.* However, the writers were no doubt paid well for them, and perhaps you can do better, from a literary point of view, and from a financial angle, as well. If you care to try, there is little, if any competition in the use of this format. But be sure you can write dialogue unusually well.

2. *POTPOURRI OF SNATCHES OF THOUGHT*, or something being read or written, or the cries of newsboys, interspersed with actual story material in the immediate or distant past. This is second cousin, once removed, to the stream-of-consciousness format. It permits many varieties of original presentation, but demands experience and skill. Style counts for a great deal. A "big name" in the by-line is almost essential. When you find a story of this type study it carefully for specific techniques and literary devices, but don't try to write it until you are a professional. To do so would almost surely be a waste of time.

While I suggest that you do not attempt, unless you are already a professional, the formats that I call Undependables and Practically Impossibles, I am under no delusion that you will follow that suggestion. In fact, I should probably be disappointed in you if you did! The more difficult a task is, *the more it challenges the adventurous spirit*. It is only by trying that we succeed. The improbable, and even what is called the impossible, is only achieved by those who give these words no place in their vocabulary.

If you have a story you think you can tell best by using one of the formats that I call an Undependable, or Practically Impossible, go right ahead. My best wishes are with you! The truth is I've a slogan on my own desk: *The difficult things can be done immediately; the impossible take a little longer.*

Method of Study

1. Write an original short short summary, using the chronological format.
2. Write an original short short summary, using the flashback format.

CHAPTER XI

Viewpoints and Transitions in the Short Short

As was stated in Chapter I, any and all viewpoints available to the writer may be, and often are, used in successful short shorts, just as they are in long shorts. Since this is the case, the writer of short shorts should know *what the viewpoints are* and *how to use them.* Since very few short shorts are written in one scene, with no shifts of viewpoint, of time or place, the writer should understand transitions and how to write them. It is important to get the reader from viewpoint to viewpoint, from place to place, from one time to another time, smoothly and with no feeling of shock or confusion. The ability to do this is one of the skills every writer must have at his finger tips *before* he can hope to become a full-time professional writer.

VIEWPOINTS

In the order of their frequency of use in short shorts appearing in the top general-interest magazines, the viewpoints available to the writer are:

1. *The Omniscient*
2. *Actor A, third person*
3. *The minor character narrator, first person*
4. *The objective*
5. *Actor A, first person*

This result was arrived at by tabulating one hundred short shorts appearing in the top general-interest magazines (see Chapter III).

A slightly different result might be secured by another survey, but there were so many more stories written from the omniscient viewpoint than from the viewpoint of Actor A, third person, and so many more stories written from the viewpoint of Actor A, third person than from any of the remaining viewpoints that the above result may be taken as substantially correct.

Strange as it may seem, only the minor character narrator, the Actor A, first person, and the objective viewpoints are natural. Or even possible viewpoints in real life. The others are arbitrary conventions, divorced from all reality, and adopted by writers from time out of mind to suit their convenience. Furthermore, they have been used so long that readers have become accustomed to them, educated to them, and so they accept them without question and without a thought of their actual impossibility. The lay reader need not concern himself about this at all, but the writer should fully understand his tools so that at all times he can use them to the best advantage. This amazing situation concerning viewpoints will be clearer when we have seen exactly what the viewpoints are.

1. *THE OMNISCIENT VIEWPOINT*

This is the viewpoint that gives the writer the greatest freedom—and also the most headaches, since it requires more skill to use successfully than any other. In other words, the student-writer must know how to use with restraint the freedom given him.

When using this viewpoint, the writer thinks of himself as omniscient and omnipresent. That is, he knows *everything* about his characters and his material that there is to know. And he can give that information to the reader either directly, or through the thoughts, as well as words, of any character in the story. The writer knows everything that has happened in the past. He can take his reader with him anywhere in time or space.

The omniscient viewpoint is especially suited to the short short form, for it enables the writer to cover more ground, give the reader more information, and in more varied ways than with any other viewpoint. Since the writer of the short short has so few words at his disposal, he must make every one he uses carry a double or triple load. He has no time to beat about the bush. He must start fast and lose no time getting to his goal—the End of his story.

The omniscient viewpoint helps him to do this, *provided his story material is suited* to the omniscient viewpoint, and provided he knows *how to use it.*

The two great dangers of the omniscient viewpoint are:

1. A tendency to jerkiness.
2. A possible weakening of unity of impression.

It provides a temptation to change scenes too frequently, to leap back and forth from the consciousness of one character to the consciousness of another, telling in one paragraph how this one feels, then in another what that one thinks. *This temptation must be sternly resisted at all times and every shift questioned as to the necessity for it.* In the short short the writer must never yield to the temptation to shift either in time, space or consciousness *unless* he can tell his story to advantage in *no other way.* This still leaves him untrammelled in giving the reader information from the omniscient viewpoint—that is, information not known to anyone in the story. This opportunity is what makes the omniscient viewpoint so incalculably valuable to the short short writer.

The omniscient viewpoint offers other advantages as well. Among these is the ability to analyze the action or thoughts of the characters and interpret them for the reader. The omniscient viewpoint also makes possible the richest, most inclusive and all-embracing Plot Steps, since the summing up proceeds from complete knowledge of all factors in the story. It is impossible to give a brief and, at the same time adequate, illustration here. Examples will be found in the stories in the Appendix to this book.

2. *ACTOR A, THIRD PERSON*

When using this viewpoint the writer sees everything *through the eyes of the main character* and is conscious of the thoughts and feelings and bodily sensations of that main character. But he tells everything to the reader in the third person. It is easy to keep this viewpoint throughout a story *by identifying yourself* with your main character, moving about with him in your imagination, seeing all that happens *as he sees it.* This viewpoint helps to give a story unity.

For an example of the main character, third person viewpoint:

> Finally Joan gave up. Andy wasn't coming. There was no use hoping any longer. She picked up a magazine and idly riffled its pages.

She was bored. The room was cold. Suddenly she heard Andy's motor horn. "Oh," she thought with a sudden rush of happiness, "he's come, after all."

Joan ran to the window. "Yoo, hoo!" she called. "Ready in a minute, Andy!" Her heart beat wildly as she ran upstairs to her room.

3. *MINOR CHARACTER, FIRST PERSON*

When this viewpoint is used a minor character tells the story in the first person. But *it is not his own story.* He, of course, can tell the reader only what he himself knows, sees, has seen, or has been told about the hero. This viewpoint is limiting in one way, but *it permits a warmth of understanding and emotion that isn't easy to get by any other means.* The minor character who tells the story usually, though not always, takes some minor part in the story. He is often an unusual, flavorful, salty character whose interesting personality and way of talking and acting give zest and variety to the story. Choose with great care the minor character who is to tell the story.

As an example of minor character, first person viewpoint:

I could have horsewhipped Andy, the young whelp, for disappointing Joan. The idee ain't practical, though, me being an old coot past seventy and in a wheel-chair to boot. But that don't keep me from being lively in my mind. I'm still able to do a lot of violent thinkin'! Joan stood by the table flipping the pages of a magazine, but not reading a line or looking at a picture. I saw her shiver. "Dang it all!" I said. "This room's cold." She didn't answer. All of a sudden, there was Andy's auto horn, tootin' away outside, loud and sassy. Joan threw the magazine to the table and ran to the window in one quick rush. "Yoo, hoo!" she called. "Ready in a minute, Andy!" The next minute I heard her feet running up the stairs and along the hall to her room.

4. *THE OBJECTIVE VIEWPOINT*

Many writers find this viewpoint fully as difficult if not more difficult to use than the omniscient viewpoint, because of the rigid self-discipline required.

The writer should first think of himself as taking a certain position in space in relation to each scene. Let us suppose that the action of

one scene takes place in a living-room. The writer thinks of himself as standing by a certain window. *Everything that happens in that scene is told as it appears from where the writer thinks of himself as standing.* If there is a screen between him and a corner of the room, he does not know what goes on in that corner except from the sounds or other sensory evidence that comes from behind that screen.

The writer of the objective viewpoint is, so far as the reader is aware, an *impersonal observer. He analyzes nothing, explains nothing, comments on nothing, interprets nothing.* He *reports* what happens as it reaches him through his five senses, *and that is all.* He does not say, "Butch shook his head *like a bull about to charge* and yelled *angrily* at Matt to get out and stay out." You see, the underlined words *represent deductions and ideas of the observer,* and are not necessarily facts.

The objective viewpoint recognizes nothing but facts that are reported by the senses of the onlooker while the action is going on. It can give no information about what happened in the past, except as some character imparts the information to some other character through the spoken word. The writer is like a camera that not only can see, but can hear, taste, smell and feel; but it cannot think, it cannot draw conclusions. *All the thinking, all the conclusions, are left to the reader.* Of course, they are only *apparently* left to the reader. The writer, by his careful manipulation of events, his choice of setting and of what happens in that setting, leaves the reader no choice but to think as the writer wants him to think, reach only the conclusions the writer wants him to reach, feel only the emotions the writer wants him to feel.

At first glance the objective viewpoint may seem inflexible and cold. Exactly the contrary is the case. Almost always in any viewpoint, *when a professional writer comes to a tremendously emotional scene he presents it from the objective viewpoint.* He does this in order to avoid any taint of sentimentality or of over-writing or of in any way seeming to strain for an effect. He presents the *facts,* and if he has built up to them well, they are stronger, more moving, more significant than anything he can *say about them,* or anything a story character *can say or think about them.* In other words, the writer *lets the facts speak for themselves.* If you will remember that, you will have little if any trouble with the objective viewpoint when you come

to write your own story. For a good example of objective writing read Ernest Hemingway's *The Killers,* a splendid short short.

The objective viewpoint is difficult to maintain for a long short story; although it is done occasionally, with excellent effect, as is proved by Hemingway. But the objective viewpoint is very well suited to a short short because of the short short's brevity and simplicity of action and ideas.

The material used to illustrate the two previous viewpoints is not suitable to the objective viewpoint since the observable action does not express strong emotion and is not in itself dramatic. Here is an example of the objective viewpoint:

> Little Alec came out of the back door. He wore a red cowboy shirt and shiny new shoes. He walked straight to Bobo's kennel, opened the wire door and went inside. Bobo, barking loudly, flung his taffy-colored body against Alec's legs. Alec knelt down and put his arms around the dog. Bobo licked the tears from Alec's cheek. Alec didn't say anything. After a while he got up and went out, shutting the door of Bobo's kennel behind him. Walking to the house, he climbed into the back seat of the car beside his father. Alec's father started the car with a lurch, and drove toward town. Alec didn't look back.

5. *ACTOR A, FIRST PERSON*

In this case the speaker is *the main character who is telling his own story.* This viewpoint is easy to use since all the writer has to do is *identify himself with the main character* and simply tell his own story *as it happened to him.* There can then be no temptation to wander off into other viewpoints, or go into the consciousness of other characters in the story. Read Sherwood Anderson's *I'm a Fool* for an excellent example of a first person story. Of course this is not a short short, but it's a classic example of a first-person story.

SUITABILITY OF MATERIAL

Now that we have taken a look at each of the viewpoints it is easy to see why the last three viewpoints: Minor Character, first person, Objective, and Actor A, first person, are the only *natural* viewpoints. No writer can actually be omniscient in real life, no writer can possibly describe a person, tell what he is doing, and at the same time

have access to his mind and his feelings at first hand. But as I have said before, the reader is educated to these viewpoints and readily accepts them *in a story* as plausible and natural. It is good for the writer that this is so. It makes the presentation of dramatic and emotional literary material very much easier.

But why do writers need these five viewpoints? Why wouldn't just one viewpoint do as well? There are a number of reasons for this. Perhaps the most important is that *story material differs:* some material is best suited to one viewpoint, other material can be told more effectively by using still another viewpoint. *It is important that the writer know before he starts to write what viewpoint will enable him to tell his story in the most effective manner.* All of this is but another example of what I am always emphasizing: *the nature of the material dictates the treatment.* Let us see how this may be ascertained:

The *Omniscient viewpoint* is best suited to story material that *demands analysis* and *interpretive comment*—and perhaps a good deal of explanation and information given the reader. This includes the character story and the theme story that requires not one person, but several of almost if not equal importance to illustrate or prove the theme. The omniscient viewpoint enables the writer to change scenes, settings, and personal viewpoints readily when necessary. It is not suited to a simple story with a single line of interest.

The *Actor A, third person viewpoint* is best suited to the story with a main character whose thoughts and emotions and feelings must be known to the reader in order that he may understand the story and be interested in it. Love stories and marriage problem stories are nearly always written from this viewpoint. Also stories of action and adventure. After all is said and done this is probably the most dramatic way to tell a story because the reader *sees* the story scenes unfold before his own eyes.

The *Minor character, first person viewpoint* is best suited to story-material that *has several lines of interest all leading into the main line of interest,* and much in it that the main character does not know until the end, if at all. The minor character should be carefully chosen for character interest and contrast with the other story actors. It is always excellent for the story covering a long time lapse and for the philosophical story.

The *Objective viewpoint* is suited to highly emotional material and to a story that can be revealed by the *action of the characters*—this of course includes what they say—rather than by thoughts, interpretation or analysis. This does not mean that the action in an objective viewpoint story need be wild or in any way unrestrained. Exactly the contrary is true. A glance, a gesture, a way of walking, can be significant of the deepest emotion and the most profound feeling. *Subtle action is nearly always more impressive than obvious action.* Remember this when you are using the objective viewpoint, either for an entire short short, or for a brief paragraph in a short short written mainly from another viewpoint. There is never any transition needed to go from any other viewpoint into the objective, because from any viewpoint the observer, whoever he may be, may at any moment observe what goes on and report it objectively.

The *Actor A, first person viewpoint* is best suited to a story that has a hero who is really not a hero, but who blunders along in his well-meaning, likable way to success and happiness, or failure as the case may be. In other words the sap story. *Never let him appear to think particularly well of himself,* which is a danger in all first person stories. The moment a story character thinks well of himself the reader doesn't think well of him. If you have a story character you want the reader to dislike heartily, show him as egotistical, self-congratulatory, pleased with everything he is and does.

If your pseudo-hero of this viewpoint has a sad story with an unhappy ending, *never let him be sorry for himself.* The reader will neither pity him nor sympathize with him if he does. He must be brave, even cheerful, under the bludgeonings of fate. If you have a story that ends in utter disaster for Actor A, don't let him tell it in the first person. Use the objective or the omniscient viewpoint, depending on your material and its requirements.

TRANSITIONS

A literary transition is a method of shifting the reader smoothly from one place to another, from one time to another, from one emotion to another, or from the viewpoint of one person to another. One or more of these kinds of transition are necessary in every story that is not presented in one setting, with a brief chronological time lapse,

and told from the viewpoint of one person. You can see from this that transitions are necessary in almost every story you will ever write. They are *necessary to avoid reader confusion.*

The success of any story depends largely on the building up of an illusion in the mind of the reader that actually he is in the make-believe land the writer has created, that actually he is watching the story unfold. A crude, jerky, or otherwise ineffective transition breaks this illusion. It "jerks the reader out of the story," as writers say. And this illusion of reality, once destroyed, is difficult to create again. If it is destroyed too many times the reader loses interest in the story. That is fatal. Why? Because the reader isn't going to continue reading stories by an author whom he doesn't enjoy.

The time and effort needed to learn to write smooth transitions is therefore very much worth while. Let us look at the principle that underlies the writing of smooth transitions, of whatever kind your story may require at any given point in that story.

A transition has one function, to shift the reader mentally from the place where he is, to another place, either in time or in space or in consciousness. When *you* make the mental shift in your story, don't expect your reader to know that you have done so. You must *help him* to make the mental shift that you have made and make it without his being aware of it.

1. *TRANSITION IN SPACE*

The following is an example of a shift *in space without a transition.* Because it is confusing, it is an example of what *not* to do:

> Marc stood by the east window watching the sun rise in a glory of pink and gold. Below him Aunt Merrie's flower garden seemed to float, unreal and fairylike in the reflected light. In the barn Jake curried the horses before hitching them to the plow.

Here, the reader is watching the sunrise and the light on the garden from the window of Marc's room. Then without being taken there, he finds himself at the barn watching Jake. The second that it takes him to orient himself in his new surroundings is a second of confusion, of wondering how he got there. Now let us see one way in which this transition, or shift in space can be made without disturbing the reader or destroying the illusion built by the story.

Example of a smooth transition in space:

> Marc stood by the east window watching the sun rise in a glory of pink and gold. Below him Aunt Merrie's flower garden seemed to float, unreal and fairylike in the reflected light. Beyond the garden loomed the great barn, almost black against the flaming sunrise. Here he knew the activities of the day had already begun, that Jake was currying the horses and soon would hitch them to the plow.

Note always that when you make a transition in space, *first be sure to tell the reader where you have taken him.* Then, afterward, what is happening there. The tendency in untrained writers is to tell the reader what is happening, then where he is. Unless the reader knows *where he is,* he cannot make a clear picture of the action taking place. For instance, this is the way an inexperienced writer might write the above transitional sentences: Jake curried the horses and hitched them to the plow *back of the barn.* Instead of

> Back of the barn, Jake curried . . . etc.

There is still another and simpler way of making a transition in space, one that is sometimes equally as effective as the longer method illustrated above. It is done this way:

> Marc stood by the east window watching the sun rise, in a glory of pink and gold, etc. In the meantime, down at the barn Jake curried the horses . . . etc. etc.

The phrase, *In the meantime,* tells the reader that he is about to be told of action taking place somewhere else. This prepares the reader for the move. Then in the next phrase the reader is told where the action is, so when the action begins *the reader can create imaginatively* a complete picture, as if he were there, looking at it.

2. *TRANSITION IN TIME*

Transitions in time are perhaps the easiest to write; the best way is the simplest way, generally speaking. This consists of merely stating how much time has elapsed since the end of the previous scene, or the time the scene opens in relation to the time of the previous scene.

Don't scorn this as almost childishly simple. Almost no inexperienced writer, whether beginner or semi-professional, always writes clear time transitions. The basic principle is to *tell your reader first* how long a time has elapsed, then go on with your story-action.

This is an example of an *incorrectly* written transition in time:

> When Ambie left, Rose hurriedly went to her room so no one would see her shed tears that pressed achingly at the back of her eyeballs. Much to her surprise, she felt quite cheerful and her mind was full of plans to make the summer a happy one for the children when she awoke next morning.

The whole trouble here is that the transitional phrase, *when she awoke next morning*, is placed at the *end* of the last sentence, instead of at the *beginning*. Consequently the reader does not know there has been a lapse of time *until* he reaches the end of the sentence. This requires him to make a complete readjustment of his ideas at this point, and do it suddenly with an unpleasant jerk. Incidentally the above paragraph is also an emotional transition.

3. *TRANSITION IN EMOTION*

This is a change from one emotion to another and, as with all transitions, this change should be indicated at the very *beginning* of the paragraph that introduces it.

4. *TRANSITION IN VIEWPOINT*

The transition from the viewpoint of one person to the viewpoint of another person includes a transition in space also, since no two persons can occupy the same space at the same time, no matter how close they may be to each other. A transition from the viewpoint of one person to the viewpoint of another cannot occur, *except when the omniscient viewpoint is being employed,* and it is perhaps the most difficult transition of all to write smoothly and hence effectively. It should be employed as seldom as possible in a story and only when the device enables the writer to present his material more effectively than otherwise would be possible.

Example of a transition from the viewpoint of one person to that of another person:

With nervous awkward fingers Annabelle pinned on her shoulder the elaborate corsage Jack had brought. She glanced at him quickly. His possessive, confident smile maddened her. "He needn't think he owns me," she thought furiously, "just because I'm wearing his flowers. I'll show him—" But she had to be nice to him now.

"Thank you, Jack," she said sweetly, wondering what he, too, was thinking back of those predatory gray eyes.

Jack, seeing her deliberately assume a placating role, felt a fleeting twinge of pity for her. "But that's nonsense!" he chided himself in anger. "She's as deep in this as I am. Why be sorry for her?"

You will see from the above that the reader's attention is shifted from Annabelle and is drawn to Jack's eyes, then to what is going on behind them; in other words, to what he is thinking. The reader then slips without sense of shock from Annabelle into seeing through Jack's eyes, and into his consciousness.

The writer of short shorts should pay special attention to transitions in viewpoint—though of course no type of transition can safely be neglected—because such transitions are absolutely necessary when making use of the omniscient viewpoint. And many of his short shorts will probably be written from that viewpoint.

The writer whose ambition is to write salable short shorts for the top markets should look for and clip from published stories outstandingly good viewpoint transitions of all types. He should practice writing smooth transitions, not only in his complete stories, but separately as a finger exercise.

Method of Study

1. What viewpoints are "natural," what are unreal and impossible but used by writers and accepted by readers?
2. What is the most used viewpoint in short shorts appearing in the top general-interest magazines? What is the least used? Why?
3. Write an example of each of the five viewpoints.
4. Write a scene containing a transition in space.
5. Write a scene containing a transition in time.
6. Write a scene containing a transition in emotion.
7. Write a scene containing a transition from the viewpoint of one person to the viewpoint of another person.

CHAPTER XII

Style and Physical Make-Up of the Short Short

THE PURPOSE of this chapter is to consider the make-up of short shorts for the top smooth-paper markets. What follows applies only in part to the "literary" short short. The latter type of story has individual characteristics that will be discussed separately in Chapter XVII.

STYLE

Style is very difficult to define, but very easy to sense. It would require at least several paragraphs to define the style of Charles Dickens or the style of Damon Runyon. But a reader of these two authors would "get" the two styles and the differences between them in half a minute or less. So we shall not waste time trying to define style, but shall take for granted that you know what style is, and, at once, consider the practical question of how to write in the modern short short "style," with its many variations, within easily understood limits.

The modern style of writing, no matter what the field, is simple, direct, with no fancy or "fine" writing. In the short short these characteristics are carried to the ultimate, consistent with a vivid presentation of the story. *Every unessential is shorn away.* The style is easy and conversational rather than formal. It is easy to read, easy to understand. The aim of the writer is to write with such simplicity and clarity that the reader will be *unconscious* of the words and of the

style—conscious only of the *ideas* and the *pictures,* with the resulting *emotions* that make up the story.

Do not ask yourself of your short short, "Am I writing this story beautifully?" Ask instead, "Am I writing this story simply and with complete clarity?" In these days of modern streamlined writing, beauty of style is largely functional. If you tell your story well, with a minimum of carefully selected words, you will almost certainly have used a beautiful style. Its beauty will be fundamental and apparent to everyone, just as is the beauty of a perfectly functioning machine, a suspension bridge, or the steel towers of a power line. We are in an age when beauty is simplicity.

Now let us look at some of the most *important details that influence and condition the style of the short short:* First, all short shorts are not written in the same style, but in different styles, all having a sort of family resemblance in common. As with any art, the material of your short short determines the particular style in which it should be written.

For example, if your short short begins with a gunman creeping up a dark alley in which seven policemen are lying in wait for your gunman and in the end they shoot it out, with two men killed, you will use a different style from that employed by you when your story is cast in the stream-of-consciousness format and concerns a strongly emotional experience with very little fast, dramatic physical action. In between the extremes of these two examples there are as many subtle gradations of style as there are types of story material. But all conform to the general modern style of the short short whose outstanding characteristics are simplicity, clarity and economy of words.

CHOICE OF WORDS

Let us begin by analyzing what kind of words are most suitable to the modern short short.

1. *Short words:* Generally speaking, the strongest words in our language are words of Anglo-Saxon origin. Anglo-Saxon words are short simple words, crammed with meaning. Most of our long, fancy words we have inherited, or compounded ourselves, from the French, Latin or Greek languages. Sometimes these long words are very useful and effective in long shorts where the canvas is larger, but in the short short written for the great mass of readers it is better, for the most

part, that these long words be left in the dictionary and the thesaurus.

For example, if your hero *walked, toddled, strode, marched* or *trotted* around the block, say so. Don't say he *peregrinated.* If you are talking about the *sky,* don't try to impress your reader by saying *firmament.* Don't refer to the moon as a heavenly *luminary;* just say *moon* and be done with it. The sky in your story may be *cerulean,* but you won't say so unless you want the editor to run a blue pencil through the word; you'll say *deep blue.*

2. *Image-making words:* These are *visual* words that *help the reader to create images,* or pictures that move your story forward. They are necessarily words that appeal to one or more of the five senses, with the emphasis on more than one, rather than only one, sense channel.

For example, sound appeals only to the sense of hearing, but unless the sound is so utterly unfamiliar that the hearer has never heard anything even resembling it before (admitting for the moment that such a condition is possible), he will instantly *create a mental picture* of the source or creator of the sound. This holds good through all the category of sense impressions. But in almost every case *one* sense impression will predominate over the other, and it is very much to the advantage of the writer to have that specific sense impression strong rather than weak. To accomplish this the best possible image-making words that are compatible with simplicity and clarity should be employed.

Image-making words are those that express motion, color, form, sound, smell, taste, and feeling. Let us examine the last three of these sense impressions, as they are not usually thought of in connection with the creation of mental images.

Smell: Suppose you have said in your short short, "There was a pleasant flower-like odor in the room." There is almost no picture-making quality in these words. But suppose you change it to, "She smelled violets." Now your reader can imagine the odor and he sees, depending on the setting, a cluster of violets and their leaves tightly bound by a strip of grass, or clumps of violets growing in a meadow, or a bottle of violet perfume. If you mention the smell of syringa your reader, if he knows his flowers, will create the image of a green bush starred with delicate white blossoms, surrounded by an old-fashioned garden. Too, the smells of specific foods have strong picture-making powers.

Taste: Words that express taste are excellent image-making words. The reader not only reproduces the taste imaginatively; he *sees and feels* what is tasted—color, form, texture, etc. Also he *creates a suitable setting* for that which he tastes. Test yourself for the images you yourself create without conscious thought while reading the following words: "Rupert took his first bite of the warm, spicy pumpkin pie."

Touch: Words that express feeling as communicated by the sense of touch have *vivid image-making power.* Suppose you have said in your short short, "Her hand touched the door." Unless you have already told the reader what kind of door this is, the reader isn't likely to make a correct, clear-cut mental image of the door and so he doesn't get all that he has a right to expect from you as a writer. But suppose you change this to read, "Her hand touched the deeply carved surface of the oak door." Now your reader can make a clear image of that door, one that will satisfy him. Or you might say, "Her hand touched the chill, hard surface of the steel door."

Turning to other image-making sense impressions received through *touch,* let us see what results we can achieve:

"He felt the wind tug at his coat, blow cold against his cheek."

This helps the reader make a fairly complete picture, including motion, form, sound and setting.

"The warmth of the open fire made him drowsy." Again through a specific kind of sensory impression, warmth from an open fire, the reader is able to create a mental picture having many details of the burning hearth and cozy background of the setting. In all probability he will *smell the odor* of the burning pine or eucalyptus log.

3. *Emotion-arousing words:* The important part emotion plays in the successful short short and how to arouse it is not generally understood. The subject will be discussed in detail in Chapter XIV. However, here we shall consider only emotion-arousing words and *how to use them.*

Most writers are aware that their short shorts should arouse one *dominant emotion* in the reader. Not so many writers are aware that *every scene should perform the same function.* Only a few seem to know that *every person, every object, every natural force should have its emotional impact on the reader.* When this is done, reader interest is much more likely to be held every step of the way, from the first words to the last. Let us see how emotion may be aroused in the

reader toward persons and ideas by the careful selection of words:

Persons: Suppose you have written the following sentence in your short short: "The man came down the street." That arouses no emotion whatsoever in the reader. This man is a mental concept only. Reader interest in purely mental concepts is very slight. You can't count on mental concepts, no matter how brilliantly they may be presented, to hold the average—and even the above-average reader—for more than a brief space of time. So what can you do about this man who is walking down the street? Well, that depends on your story, on what you want to do with him, on what emotion you want the reader to feel toward him. Whatever that emotion is, arouse it, or at least begin to arouse it, as soon as the man appears.

Since at this point we are considering only single words as emotion-arousers, we are somewhat handicapped, but not seriously. Let us select several different emotions the reader might feel toward this man.

Suppose we try pity first, and with that in mind we write something like this: "The old man limped down the street."

I am sure you will agree that the reader will be much more interested in this man than in the first one. Why? Because the reader *feels an emotion* toward a specific man and he's old. The emotion of sympathy.

Now let us add another emotion to the one already felt by the reader, the emotion of admiration: "The old man limped intrepidly down the street."

The reader *likes* to feel pity and admiration. His interest in the man is still further snared by the presentation of an admirable character trait, that of courage, a character trait that always promises action and drama. The reader doesn't stop to figure all this out, but it affects him just the same. However, you, the writer, had better know *exactly how* to get effects that are pleasing to the reader; get them easily, swiftly and surely. Guesswork doesn't get the modern writer very far.

Keep in mind that success comes to the one *who knows and puts into practice what he knows.*

Make sure that as you bring one of your story characters on the stage you arouse reader emotion toward him. If he is a major character the emotion will be as strong as possible, *of its kind,* whether the

emotion is admiration, sympathy, fear, hatred, or, in the case of the light story, amusement. If a character is of small importance the emotion need not be especially strong, but *some degree of emotion should be aroused toward every character in your story.*

Objects and natural forces: If you have not thought of objects and natural forces as having emotional possibilities, now is the time to begin your thinking. When you put that thinking into practice your writing will immediately have greater reader interest.

Let us select some familiar inanimate object and see what we can do about giving it a negative and then a positive emotional quality:

Negative emotion toward an object:

> The kerosene lamp on the kitchen table shed its light mercilessly on him, revealing his patched, threadbare suit, his chapped, cold-reddened hands.

Positive emotion toward an object:

> The kerosene lamp on the kitchen table flooded the room with its cheerful, welcoming light.

Negative emotion aroused toward a natural force:

> The March wind blew with unruly violence.

Positive emotion aroused toward a natural force:

> The March wind blew with robust vigor.

Either of the last two statements is far more interesting than the flat, unemotional statement: The March wind blew.

4. *Word combinations and phraseology:* Keep these as simple and straightforward as you can. Don't obscure your story with unnecessary and therefore hurtful words. Don't say:

> The serpentine thoroughfare twisted its circuitous way along the precipitous side of the deep gash that had been graved slowly and inexorably by natural forces in the towering mountain range.

Don't for a moment think this sentence is an exaggeration. I have been working with student-writers for two dozen years. Sentences like that, and even more involved, are being written by untrained writers every hour of every day. And in short shorts, too, where there isn't space for *one unnecessary* word. Why not say instead, "The road looped and twisted up one side of the canyon?"

Don't ever write anything resembling this:

> "How can I help it?" she choked, looking up at him with fear-stricken eyes. Her face was ashen pale. She reached up and straightened his tie with trembling fingers.

It's just too much! The reader knows you are trying to *ju jitsu* him into feeling sorry for this hysterical female. And he doesn't like it. He doesn't feel anything toward her, except perhaps a faint loathing. Instead write something like this:

> "How can I help it?" she asked uncertainly. Trying to hide her fear she reached up and straightened his tie with only a little less than her usual cool competence.

Now the reader, lulled by simplicity of statement into believing that he is free to *feel as he pleases,* rather likes the gal and admires her self-control in what is evidently a difficult situation.

5. *Sentence construction in the short short:* Sentences should be short. They should contain but one idea, or at the most, two closely related ideas. The reader of a short short, not only doesn't want to, but will not pause and ponder over a sentence trying to discover what it means. *He expects to understand it the instant he reads it.* And with no conscious effort.

Here is the kind of interminable as well as involved sentence that drives editors mad but fortunately almost never sees print:

> Pete came to town that day hoping to see Lana, but she wasn't at home because three days before her Aunt Bet, who lived sixty miles away in Lancaster County, came down with a spell of arthritis which was not surprising considering the old woman's age and the way she insisted on doing heavy farm work in all kinds of weather, so she sent for Lana and Lana felt she had to go.

This might be written in more intelligible form as follows:

> Pete came to town that day hoping to see Lana, but she wasn't at home. Three days before, Lana's Aunt Bet, who lived sixty miles away in Lancaster County, had come down with a spell of arthritis. This wasn't surprising, considering the old woman's age and the way she insisted on doing heavy farm work in all kinds of weather. Aunt Bet promptly sent for Lana and Lana felt she had to go.

The basic technique of writing simple, short sentences is, first, *to think clearly,* and then *to question every connective.* Three connectives, *because, which,* and *so,* were removed with helpful results from the above example of what-not-to-do when writing sentences. Take out and replace with a period every connective you use in a short short, that isn't absolutely necessary. Pretend to yourself that every connective you use costs you five dollars, cash, and keep in mind that periods cost you nothing.

Don't be afraid to use broken sentences, incomplete sentences, sentences without subjects, sentences without verbs, even single words as sentences, *if by doing so you can achieve a better effect* than by using complete sentences. *Remember you have undertaken to create an illusion of reality,* and *any device or means that creates it effectively is the one to use.*

Also most dialogue is fragmentary—because it's the way we talk in real life. When people in real life talk under the stress of emotion or the impact of dramatic happenings, they are far more intent on expressing what they feel and think than on composing flowing, euphonious sentences. You don't hear them say, "I do not," "I will not," "I cannot." They say "I don't," "I won't," "I can't."

Suppose your story hero truly loves his wife but he fears she doesn't believe it. Would he say something like this:

> "Lou, my darling, I love you with my whole heart. You must believe that I am speaking the truth. What other reason could impel me to come here today, humiliate myself as I have done? Please say that you believe me."

If a man actually talked like that his wife most certainly would be through with him! But suppose he says something like this:

"Lou . . . darling. I came because. . . . well, there's only one possible reason, I . . . love you. Oh, Lou, if you'll only believe me!"

Well, that's more like it. After that she's certain to melt into his arms and say it's all her fault. Why? Because it's convincing. It's the way *real* people talk in *real* situations. Try to have your story characters talk naturally.

DIALECT

Now a word of caution about the use of dialect, colloquialisms, regional ways of speaking, and slang characteristic of different ages and groups.

Don't use any of these in your short shorts unless:

(1) You are familiar with them at first-hand; or

(2) You have read exhaustively the work of authors who *do* know them at first-hand and can use them skillfully.

Don't guess at what such words are like, don't dream up completely new ones out of your own head. *Know what you are writing about—or don't write about it!* Not long ago I received a story from a student in which a purported member of the Russian nobility spoke in as pure pidgin English as a San Francisco Chinese laundryman ever used. In another, an old hoss wrangler on the Bar-X Ranch spoke in a unique jargon never heard on land or sea. There is nothing unusual about young writers making these mistakes. But the serious writer cannot afford to make such serious mistakes long.

Never use dialect, regional manner of speech, and *other speech peculiarities to excess.* Many people find them distracting and/or hard to read. Use just enough to *indicate the effect* you want. And not enough so that the reader mires down in uncertainty and finally quits reading, wishing he could tell what your story is about. A little distinctive speech adds color and flavor to certain types of stories, but it must be handled with the same discretion that a good cook uses tabasco sauce, or garlic.

Take a tip from radio's treatment of background sound effects. For example, at the beginning of a scene you may hear the sound of an airplane with faint voices under it. Swiftly the roar of the airplane sinks to a hum while the voices grow in volume to a distinct conversation. We know that two people are in an airplane, talking.

Then the sound of the airplane dies out altogether and we do not hear it again until in a pause in the conversation it comes up slightly, reminding us of the setting. A similar technique is applicable to the use of colorful ways of talking. Never let dialect obscure your story, *only aid it.*

Characteristic sentence construction is sometimes all that is needed to indicate a dialect. "When are you all coming over?" is sufficient to tell the reader that a Southerner is speaking. "Come on in, stranger," tells the reader he is listening to a man from the cow country, without a single "Wall, I dunno," or "He's the quickest feller on the draw in this hyar caounty."

Never rely on spelling alone to indicate a dialect or a foreign accent. Remember, the character in your story is *speaking,* not writing, and the *sound* of the words he uses are all that matters. Misspelling a word doesn't necessarily indicate a sound other than the correct one, and it certainly doesn't indicate any form of dialect or other unusual way of speaking. Yet untrained writers are forever trying to write dialect and dialect's cousins—colloquialisms and regional ways of speaking—by misspelling a few words here and there. Unfortunately the effect cannot be attained that easily.

For example, suppose you have a character in your story, a young Italian gardener. He says and you write, "The early burd catches the wurm, you say? That is very funny." *Bird,* and *worm* sound just the same when you spell them with a *u* as when you don't, because they are pronounced as if they were spelled with a *u.* So you have accomplished nothing, except to show that you don't know how to indicate the way uneducated Italians in this country speak English. Or maybe, and this is more likely, you just plain don't know how they speak and you think you don't have to learn before writing a story about them. Well, that's where you're wrong. An editor can spot a phony like that in the dark.

So when using a character who speaks in an unusual way, *be sure you know exactly how he would speak,* and then have him use his peculiar pronunciations or choice of words with *restraint, so that they do not get between the reader and the story.*

The style of a short short is a compound made up of many elements, only the most important of which we have had space to touch on here. It may be infinitely varied by the demands of its story

material, the kind of characters it portrays, by the mentality and temperament of the writer, but all these variations should be within the broad limits of what is known as modern style. A good practical test of whether your style in any single story is good or not is to ask yourself these questions:

Have I told my story simply and clearly, with no obvious striving for effect?

Would I *say* it this way if I were talking informally to a friend?

Would my characters talk as they do if they were real people instead of imaginary actors in a story?

If you can answer those questions in the affirmative, the style of your short short is probably all right, acceptable to editors and to readers.

PHYSICAL MAKE-UP

A short short that is acceptable, so far as its content and presentation is concerned, still has three strikes against it if it doesn't *look like* a story written by a professional. Part of a story's professional appearance must be planned before the final copy is made and part of it may be taken care of while the final copy is being typed.

With every revision of your short short, pay close attention to the length of your sentences and to their rhythm. Keep your sentences short. On an average, they should be shorter than in a long short because you are necessarily presenting literary ideas in a simpler form and have fewer words at your disposal.

While you are doing this, at the same time you must guard against two dangers: Choppiness and monotony. Short sentences of very nearly the same length have a disagreeable effect on the reader. *Vary the length of your sentences.* In some sentences place the important idea at the beginning of the sentence, in others at or near the end, as the material may demand. *By varying the point of greatest emphasis, you vary the rhythm.* This, along with sentences of different lengths, makes monotony impossible.

Give thoughtful attention to paragraphing. Cut your short short into a larger number of paragraphs than you might use if the material were part of a long short. One advantage of short paragraphs is that they make a page look more interesting, more readable. An unbroken column of print discourages the reader, an unbroken page of manu-

script discourages the editor. It *looks uninteresting.* There is no need for your short short to look uninteresting either in manuscript form or printed in a magazine, when with a little *thought* and *planning* you can break it into frequent paragraphs. When you complete an idea, begin a new paragraph.

Another, and most important reason for proper paragraphing of a short short is that by this mechanical means the writer can make his story more dramatic by placing strong emphasis on a speech by a story character, a sentence, or even a single word. Let us see how to go about doing this.

Paragraphing dialogue: Be sure to paragraph *every speech* made by your characters, unless it is *very brief* and in addition comparatively *unimportant.* Don't bury an important speech in the middle of a paragraph, or tack it on as an afterthought at the end. Put it in a paragraph by itself, so the reader will get its full import and force.

Example of the *wrong* way:

> Joel came into the room where Mother and I were sitting. He walked about restlessly, saying, "I don't know why all of this bad luck has to happen to me." As he turned to face us his elbow knocked Aunt Tibbie's alabaster vase off the what-not. Joel looked down at the pallid fragments on the floor without surprise. "You see?" he said helplessly.

Now let's see how we can better the effect by *correct* paragraphing:

> Joel came into the room where Mother and I were sitting. He walked about restlessly.
>
> "I don't know why," he remarked gloomily, "all this bad luck has to happen to me."
>
> Turning to face us, his elbow knocked Aunt Tibbie's alabaster vase off the what-not. Joel looked down at the pallid fragments without surprise.
>
> "You see?" he said helplessly.

The second version not only *looks* more interesting, it *is* more interesting, *because the paragraphing has helped to make the significance clearer* as well as to guard against monotony. It has placed that emphasis at the proper points.

Now let us see how we can detract from or increase the drama of a single sentence by paragraphing.

The *wrong* way:

> All day we had waited apprehensively for the storm. Since early morning sooty clouds had been massing themselves against the San Clemente mountains. At noon a gusty wind began to twist the treetops and whip the chrysanthemum stalks in the garden. Now it was almost night. Suddenly the storm broke.

Now visualize the above with the last sentence set off in a separate paragraph, like this:

> Suddenly the storm broke.

By this simple device you have made the arrival of the storm more dramatic and more important; therefore more impressive and more interesting.

Single words, or simple phrases may also be given separate paragraphing with excellent results. Two examples of this, *correctly* paragraphed, follow:

> There was no sound. Behind, the empty desert stretched away to the pale horizon. No bush rustled. No bird chirped. No breeze whispered across the tawny dunes.
>
> Silence.

And this:

> The sound of the great waves pounding on the rocks far below filled us with dread.
>
> Boom! Boom! Boom!
>
> The solemn dirge went on and on . . . in implacable rhythm.

It needs no explanation for you to see how much dramatic force the mechanical device of paragraphing has added to the above passages. Paragraphing is an important part of writing a salable story, so plan your paragraphs intelligently, with care and judgment—and a certain amount of fearlessness because you are *creating an emotion* and not following rules in a copybook.

MAKING THE FINAL COPY

Now to *making the final copy of your story:* First, type it neatly, with as few corrections as possible. Either type these corrections, or print them in ink.

Use a *fresh ribbon,* one that makes a sharp black impression, and of course make at least one carbon copy for your own files.

Use a *good quality,* white, sixteen-pound bond for the original, preferably one of the easily erasable kinds to ensure neat corrections.

Type your name and address in the upper left-hand corner, the approximate number of words in your story in the upper right-hand corner. The word count of a short short should be accurate. Count all the words including *a, an,* and *the.*

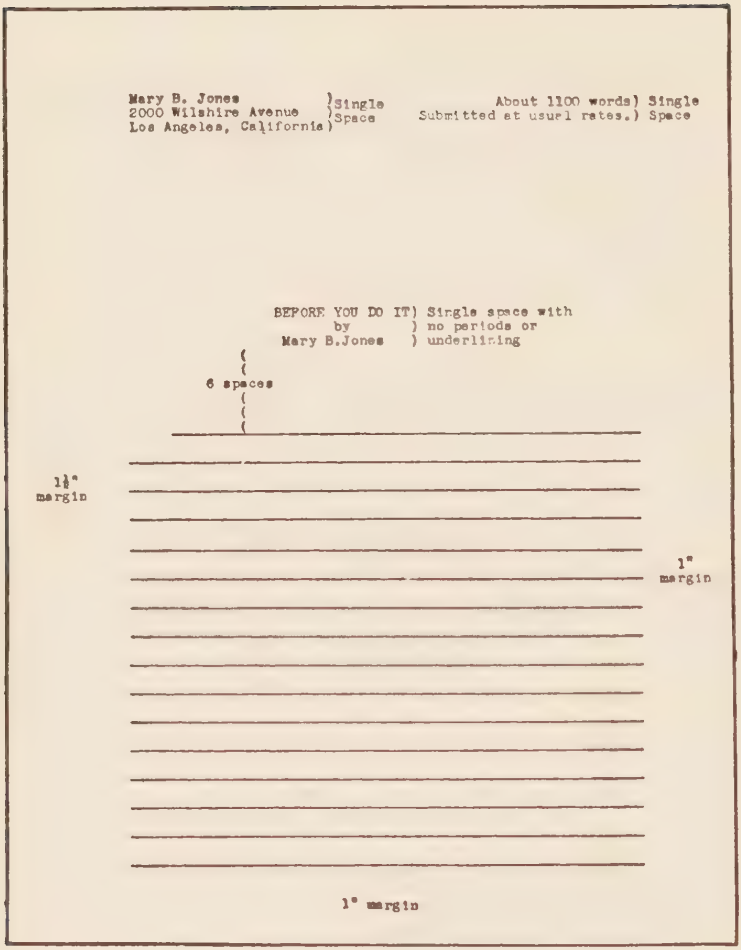
Center the title about one third way down the page. One space below the title, type the word "by" and on the immediate following line your name as you wish it to appear when your story is published. If you are using a *nom de plume,* here is where it goes. Six spaces below this begin your story. Leave a one and a half inch margin at the left-hand side of the page and begin your story. Leave one inch-wide margins elsewhere.[1]

Short shorts under fifteen hundred words may be folded once. Short shorts of one thousand words or under may be folded twice. If longer than fifteen hundred words, they should be mailed flat. Always *enclose a self-addressed envelope,* with *sufficient postage affixed,* for return. Do not write a letter to accompany your story, *unless you have a very good reason for writing.* And very good reasons for writing letters to editors are rare. Above all, don't write a letter to the editor telling him your story is true—it actually happened. Editors are allergic to this type of letter. The editor knows that no one except a beginner ever writes a story exactly as it happened. Life must be *interpreted* and made *significant* before it is interesting *as a piece of fiction.*

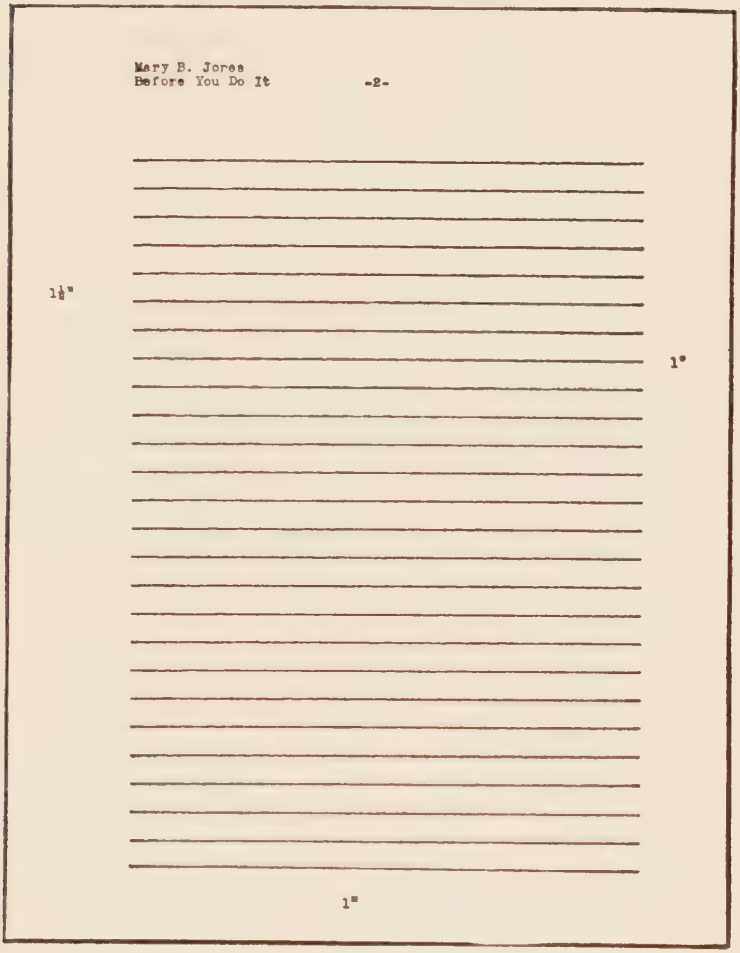
Always keep a record of when you send a story out and where you sent it. Also, if this is necessary, when it is returned. If you have faith in a story you have written, keep sending it around. A story never sold while it was lying in a desk drawer. The only time a story

[1] See sample pages on Pages 132 and 133.

Sample first page:



Sample page 2 and all pages that follow:



can sell is when it is on an editor's desk. So get your stories where they will sell.

Method of Study

1. Write not less than half a page, using as many sense impressions as your material permits. Be sure the sense impressions have a high degree of image-making power.
2. (a) Write a brief description of a story character that arouses no emotion in the reader toward the character.
   (b) Rewrite the above so that the reader will feel the emotion of dislike toward this story character.
   (c) Rewrite (a) so that the reader likes this person, feels friendly toward him.
3. Same as No. 2, except that you will write about an object.
4. Same as No. 2, except that you will write about a natural force.
5. Write a strongly emotional scene with great simplicity.
6. Write a paragraph, or brief scene, in which dialect, or accent, or regional speech or slang is used correctly and with restraint.
7. Write a scene containing narration and dialogue. Paragraph it correctly, as if it were a part of a short short.

CHAPTER XIII

Timeliness and Taboos

TIMELINESS is far more important in a short short than in a long short. This timeliness may range from nothing more than a present-day setting and present-day characters to a story concerning the latest scientific development, the newest method of transportation, or the most recent international complication. Timeliness, in some degree, is practically a "must" for short shorts, no matter toward what magazine or group of magazines your story may be slanted.

There is, of course, a reason for this. Within the limits of a short short, the minimum—the vignette—being four hundred and fifty words or less than five hundred, the maximum, two thousand words or a few hundred over, there is no time to establish in the mind of the reader a more or less unfamiliar character, an unfamiliar period, and an unfamiliar setting. *A short short must be written with the assumption that the reader is already familiar with the background and conditions and characters used.* The writer, using as few words as possible *merely indicates* these, and the reader, out of his memory and knowledge, fills in the details.

Therefore, the period of almost all short shorts is the *familiar present.* The characters are in present-day settings, facing problems that are a part of today's life.

But a greater timeliness than merely a present-day setting will automatically increase your chance of selling your story. So why not take advantage of this when you can?

If it is no more than giving the girl in your story the latest hair-do, and showing her as wearing the newest *Vogue* creation—provided of

course she is that kind of girl—your story is helped just that much. Your story is made more immediate, and hence more vivid, by this simple device of injecting modernity into it. It is a psychological fact the writer will do well to remember that people are more interested in what happens today than in what happened a year ago; and more interested in what happened a year ago than in what happened fifty years ago. The farther back in time you take your reader, the more difficult it is to get and hold his interest in your story. So, if you possibly can, make your short shorts seem to have happened no later than yesterday.

You can do this by tying your stories into any modern activity, any modern interest, creating them out of the very material of today's living. This means you must keep yourself informed on current events, on new discoveries, on new trends of thought. Perhaps you remember when psychoanalysis was new. If so, you will also remember that the magazines were full of both serious and light stories about people who believed or did not believe in psychoanalysis. Whenever there is a major war anywhere in the world there are countless stories of people at the front, and at home where only the effect of the war is felt. Back in the 90's bicycles were very much in evidence in stories. Then came automobiles, then airplanes, all used to give timeliness to stories.

The writer of short shorts must come down out of his ivory tower and *know what is going on in the world around him.* He must know the latest slang, modern ways of expressing thoughts and ideas, what is being done, thought, discussed, dreamed about. He will get this information, not only from reading fiction but from reading articles and the best of the non-fiction books written by experts, specialists and people who have had unusual experiences. Best of all, he will get it from life itself. The young writer will be wise to have as many points of contact with life as possible. For example, if he will visit a factory making plastics, he is almost certain to pick up an idea for a story that features plastics in some way. And so his story will be timely, and, if he gathers his material carefully, the story will be authentic, convincing in its modernity.

A word of warning here may save you rejections, or even severe humiliations. No matter where your story is laid, or what it is about, *be sure of every fact you use, even the most trivial.* Editors check

facts in stories and if they find one or two of yours wrong, they will reject your story because they will know they can't trust you. If, being human, they sometimes let an incorrect detail slip by and your story is published, a deluge of protests descends on that editor and you have made your last sale to him.

To cite one instance: Some time ago a short short was printed in a national magazine in which two small Dutch boys took a million dollars' worth of gold out of their country hidden in two cheeses that were on a sled pulled by the two boys. The unfortunate writer had neglected to find out *how much a million dollars' worth of gold weighs*. Hundreds of disgruntled readers wrote in to *tell* him and the editor of the magazine that that much gold weighs about a ton. This made the whole story ridiculous. So you *be sure of your facts*. Not to be sure is inexcusable; sooner or later your carelessness will reap its just reward.

Now to return to the quality of timeliness in your short short: Timeliness is one of the greatest aids—if not actually the greatest aid—in dressing up an old plot and making it salable. For example, only this morning I read a short short about a girl who had to decide between marrying two young men; one rich, the other poor. Naturally, in the end, she decided to marry the poor young man. This is probably one of the oldest plots in existence. But it is just as good today as it was a thousand years ago, provided the writer using it makes his story *timely*. The writer of this story accomplished the feat by placing the story in the Washington of *today*. His heroine was a Government office worker. But the important timely touch was using the refugee king of some foreign country—the name of the country not being stated—as an important character.

No matter how old the plot you use may be, if you give it timeliness you have a good chance of selling your story.

TABOOS

The taboos that are in force for short shorts are practically the same as those that apply to long shorts. And, in general, the taboos of short fiction are the same as those of radio and scenario writing. Taboos differ in different fields. To be specific, your character may swear, smoke, drink and dance in the top general-interest maga-

zines, while they may do none of these things in the young people's and secondary women's magazines.

The only safe way for the professional writer to proceed is to study his market until he is sure he knows the taboos in force in that field. However, a survey of the main fields for the purpose of ascertaining their most important taboos will be helpful.

1. *THE TOP GENERAL-INTEREST MAGAZINES FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN*

There are fewer taboos in this field of *Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, Cosmopolitan, Redbook, American, Liberty,* than in any other general field. And all but a handful of these taboos are broken at long intervals, too. Perhaps the one absolutely unbreakable taboo is that which forbids the writer to say anything detrimental, in any way, to the business of an advertiser in that magazine. There is nothing wicked about this, as writers and critics would have us believe. It is a simple matter of loyalty to the men who make the magazine possible, so don't let this taboo disturb you or cause you to become indignant. If it were not for the advertisers you wouldn't sell your story, because there would be no magazine. Magazine publishers make their money from advertising, not subscriptions. You know that, don't you?

Therefore, if you really want to sell, don't write stories for this general-interest market that, in effect, tell housewives they don't need vacuum cleaners, or tell business men they don't need to insure their property. If you do, you won't sell your story and you will not deserve to sell it, *because you will not have gone about your business of writing* in a commonsense, businesslike way in a commercial world of intense competition.

Also don't write the story that features suicide, miscegenation, severe illness, extreme suffering, gruesome details of insanity, wounds, death, etc. The untrained writer is almost sure to use and emphasize at least some of the above subjects in his stories, and for a very good reason; they are dramatic. But unless they are handled with outstanding skill, they are dramatic in the wrong way. They cause the reader to feel emotions he doesn't enjoy feeling. It is true that stories breaking these taboos are sometimes published in this field, but very rarely. When you find one, analyze it carefully to see exactly *how the writer overcame* or nullified the aspects of his story that are taboo.

Until you are a "big name" writer it is, practically speaking, a waste of time to break the specific taboos of a market where you want to sell your story.

Other taboos in this field, and in most others, are the murder of a close relative such as a mother, father, brother, sister, or child, by the main character; showing disrespect for religion, motherhood, law or other recognized authority; using chance or fate or coincidence to solve the story problem; controversial subjects, and a story within a story. Let us look at these in a little more detail, for even writers who should know better break these taboos frequently, and when they do they rarely sell that story.

The *murder of a mother, father, sister, brother, or child,* is so contrary to our deep, ingrained feelings about family ties and family loyalty that it shocks the reader in a most unpleasant way, even when a villain commits the crime. When a main character commits the crime the reader loses all sympathy and liking for him. This is not necessarily the case if the main character kills an enemy, or even someone he has once loved, such as a wife or husband, *provided* the writer has *completely justified the murderer in the eyes of the reader.* However, the easiest, the most effective way to do this is to have the murderer kill *from an unselfish motive,* a motive to protect someone else.

Showing *disrespect for religion,* any religion, is sure to offend a great many readers. And editors have learned that offended readers have a way of cancelling their subscriptions. So editors try not to buy stories that will offend even a small number of their readers. If religious belief of any kind appears in your stories, treat it respectfully, even reverently. That is an old American tradition. Observe how these taboos are observed in the movies and you will know how to handle them in your stories—for remember the same rules apply.

Disrespect for motherhood is in the same category as disrespect for religion. Motherhood has come to be a symbol of everything that is unselfish, devoted and self-sacrificing. If your story material demands that you portray a mother who does not live up to these ideals, be sure that you do not make it appear that she is typical, but rather the exception.

Disrespect for law or other duly constituted authority is a certain way of getting your story back with a rejection slip. Writers will do

well to remember that readers, as such, are very much more moral, more conservative, more idealistic, when they are reading. In other words, *they are sitting in judgment,* in all probability unconsciously. But judging nevertheless. Hence a man, who would think nothing of talking back to a policeman in no uncertain terms, will in all probability dislike a character in a story who does the same thing. Writers must know a great deal about the psychology of the human mind; in other words, about the queer mental quirks most of us possess. So don't have your likable story characters impudent to policemen, sarcastic to judges, contemptuous toward preachers, and evading the law. You can't get away with it. If readers don't like your stories, you aren't going to be a selling author.

The use of *chance, fate or coincidence* to bring about the solution of your story problem necessarily makes your story weak. *It destroys* the sequence of cause and effect, which the reader likes. Of course, chance and coincidence do solve problems in real life, but in a story no one will believe them. They are too easy a way for the writer out of his difficulties. *Causes set up in the Beginning of the story must work themselves out* to a logical, even inevitable, conclusion at the End. The only place in a story where it is safe to use chance and coincidence is in the Beginning, where it plays a part in bringing about the story situation. For example, the reader willingly accepts it when an accident or coincidence brings the boy and girl together, but he will not accept chance or coincidence, willingly or otherwise, if chance or coincidence solves their problems and brings them together again after their inevitable trouble. So beware of having your hero on Bank Night win five hundred dollars, enough to furnish an apartment for the little woman, and so make it possible for them to be married.

Instead, have the hero, by a remarkable bit of cleverness, or skill, or ingenuity, earn the five hundred dollars. Then, not to solve his problem, but as the icing on his cake, the reader will be happy when he wins the Bank Night prize. This same principle works also in the case of the reward for the captured criminal, grandfather's will found at the opportune moment in the old clock, and the unexpected return of Uncle Zeke with plenty of money and sufficient benevolent intentions to pay off the mortgage.

Controversial subjects, such as the struggle between capital and

labor, political disputes, religious cults, special beliefs and *isms,* these are not good subjects for fiction and should be avoided. Anyway, short fiction is not a good form to use for converting the world to your way of thinking about anything. If you want to convert the world, write an article, a novel or a legitimate play. You'll stand a much better chance of selling your ideas in those forms than in the form of a short story.

This does not mean that your story should not have a theme. Almost all worth-while stories, even short shorts, have more or less clearly apparent themes. Some are written with almost the sole purpose, with the exception of entertainment of course, of illustrating or proving a theme. But such a theme is, without exception, *one with which the great majority of readers will whole-heartedly agree.* They like the story because it says what they believe. Only the story says it more cleverly, more interestingly, and more forcefully than the reader can say it.

Don't put a story inside the story you first started out to tell. Readers and, therefore editors, don't like it. Such a way of presenting fictional material is destructive of unity, of drama, of emotion, and hence of interest. Don't have your main character convinced he is doing wrong, or convinced that another course than the one he is pursuing would be more advantageous to him, by having a stranger sit down by him in the street car and tell the main character the sad story of the stranger's life, when he made the same mistake that the main character is making now. The reader isn't interested in this stranger. He doesn't care what this stranger did or what happened to him in the distant past of completed action. What the reader wants to know is *what the main character is going to do about his problem NOW.*

2. MEN'S MAGAZINES

This field is so wide that the individual magazines must be studied in order to determine their specific taboos. For example, in men's adventure magazines, sex, except in a pure idealized form, never rears its ugly head. Stories in these magazines are written of men, for men and by men, they invariably deal with adventure and the big open spaces and usually there is no love ingredient in these stories whatsoever. And if it does appear, it is of minor importance.

As for *Esquire,* it has no other treatment except one of utter sophistication.

On the contrary, in the fraternal magazines for men, such as *Elks Magazine,* and *Rotarian,* sophistication is taboo, along with even the slightest taint of cynicism about religion, the home, sweetheart, wife and mother, and the American Way of Life.

3. *NEWSPAPER SYNDICATES*

This is an excellent field for the writer who is just finding his place in the short short writing world. He will, however, have plenty of competition from the "big name" writers—enough to make it interesting—for many of the big fellows sell in this ever-hungry market. All the taboos that hold good for the top general-interest field hold good here and are even more rigid than in the better paying field. Of course, as elsewhere, some taboos are occasionally broken here. But it is not advisable to break them. Less rigid, but still very strong taboos in this market exist here against stories of old people, stories without romance, and stories with unhappy endings. In the top general-interest magazines, on the other hand, there often appear stories with the so-called "unhappy ending," but this type of story requires a special technique to handle successfully. It is definitely not a story for a beginner, or even a semi-professional.

4. *SECONDARY WOMEN'S MAGAZINES*

This is a very important field for the beginning writer. It comprises dozens of magazines of which you may never have heard; regional magazines, special group magazines, semi-religious magazines of many grades of excellence and rates of pay. The literary requirements of some are very high, the rate of pay, while not dazzling, is good indeed, and they are easier to break into. *Nearly all use short shorts.* These magazines are well worth your most careful attention.

In addition to the general taboos previously discussed, their main taboos are those against profanity, drinking, sex irregularities, and anything outside the bounds of good taste. They like idealized romance, marriage problem stories, stories featuring older women. There is no actual taboo against having a man as your main character, but a masculine hero is seldom used in women's magazine publications, especially the better ones like *Household* and *Holland's,* the

family magazines. These swing over toward the requirements of the top general-interest magazines.

5. *SEMI-RELIGIOUS AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S MAGAZINES*

In almost all these publications there is a taboo against the too obvious moral, and against writing that is too "preachy." The stories must not feature crime, war, hunting, gambling, smoking and, in some cases, dancing. The characters must not be "goody-goody," but natural, normal, likable people. Very few true villains are allowable. The obstacles in the way of the hero's success are usually circumstances or natural forces. *Character building and right conduct are stressed.* In these magazines *adults are not permitted in major roles.* No character very much older or very much younger than the age group for which the magazine is intended, is permitted to play a major role in a story.

There is one major taboo that applies to all magazines that publish fiction and to almost all that publish non-fiction. *That taboo is against old-fashioned writing.* There are styles in writing, as in everything else. You may have a grand story, but if you dress it in an outmoded style of writing you will not sell it. There are, within the limits of today's writing, an infinite number of styles from which you may select the one that suits you best, just as there are an unlimited number of styles in clothing from which you may select the dress or suit that pleases you, that expresses your personality. The man or woman of today has no urge to buy a dolman or a beaver hat. But many untrained writers are still in the literary realm of the dolman and the beaver hat. If you are one of these, make the transition into the world of today *as quickly as you can.*

You can do this by *reading current magazines,* the magazines you want to write for, regularly and analytically. Note the vocabulary, the sentence structure, the kind of words that are used, the ideas and problems presented, the length and choice of material, the preferred wordage.

Short shorts are a modern form of the short story and, as is to be expected, they are written in a modern style, a style peculiarly their own, though varying with the different requirements of the magazines in which they appear. Do not read *Esquire* and *Harper's*

Bazaar and expect to write for *Collier's* and *Liberty*. While the styles used by all these magazines are modern, they are different—very different in their presentation.

If you have not yet decided what magazine or group of magazines you want to write for, *read a wide variety* and *practice writing the same episode, scene or story in the style of each one.* Very soon you will have discovered the style you like best. That will be the style by and through which you will best be able to express your ideas, thoughts, and emotions.

Strive in every way, from style, to word selection, to sentence construction, to setting, to your own mental emotional attitude, to the problem, and the smallest details of your story to *make it timely.* Avoid the taboos until you have had a great deal of experience, until you know the specific techniques required for breaking them, and until you become a writer with established markets.

Then you will be able to break some taboos, and sell your stories in spite of them.

Method of Study

1. Write an original short short that has several elements of timeliness. Enumerate these.
2. Write a short short that uses regional speech, or dialect, properly; that is, with restraint, and from your own personal knowledge of how your characters would naturally talk.

CHAPTER XIV

Emotion in the Short Short

It has been said, and truly, that any story, in order to be interesting must offer the reader a satisfying emotional experience. This is the final yardstick by which stories are judged that appear in all "commercial" magazines, that is other than the "literary" publications, and often it is the yardstick for them.

The writers of short shorts should concentrate on making their stories the best and most satisfying emotional experience for the reader that they can. Why is this? Because the space limitations of the short short almost entirely forbid the presentation of a complicated character, the use of a particularly beautiful and individual style, or more than a minimum of atmosphere, setting or mood.

Since this emotional experience is so important to the success of your story, it is only common sense to *think* and *plan, before you start to write,* just *what this emotional experience* is to be, and what the main factors are that will help to create it in the heart and mind of the reader.

Fuzzy thinking will not do in any kind of creative writing, and the short short demands a very high degree of clear thinking. To that end we should learn to think "on paper." That is, write down your thoughts about your story; then go back, discarding some, adding others, combining, shifting and strengthening them. *Don't be in a hurry.* This stage of thinking "on paper" is very important. *It helps to clarify your projected story in your own mind. And until it is clear there, you cannot reasonably expect to write it clearly for the reader.* In this paper-thinking stage, you can make changes quickly and

easily that may require hours to make after your story is written. For the time you spend at this stage of your story, *you will save many times as much when it comes to actually putting your story on paper* and doing the subsequent revision and polishing.

So how shall we think creatively about the emotions we want in the short short we are planning, and how shall we think creatively about the emotions we want our story to build in the reader? In other words, how can we make our short short a completely satisfying emotional experience for the reader?

We can do this only *if we know beforehand the dominant emotion,* or blend of emotions *we want our reader to feel when he has finished our story.* Then we can build that emotion, or blend of emotions, step by step to a strong, effective climax. It is not enough that we have what seems to us an interesting story to tell. In addition *we must make sure* that it is an interesting story that will leave *the reader feeling a clear-cut emotion,* or blend of emotions.

The basic emotion the writer wants his reader to feel when the reader comes to the end of his short short is one of *satisfaction.* So you make sure that the progress of your story is logical, proceeding from cause to effect; without dependence on chance or coincidence to bring about the Ending; without you, as writer, "making things happen." All the emotions you create in your reader are pleasurable emotions; that is, emotions he likes to feel. These are not necessarily "happy" or what we ordinarily think of as pleasant emotions. The reader likes to feel hatred toward a character almost as much as he likes to admire and feel sympathy for a character. He likes to feel deep sympathy because of a character's sorrows, but he does not like to feel stark despair or horror. Consequently, the saddest Ending should in almost all instances be relieved by some bright spot, some rainbow of promise, however faint, for the future. You see, then, why gruesome details of suffering, wounds, death, should not be given? The reader does not like to feel the emotions they arouse.

The short short that leaves the reader with an emotion of satisfaction does not move along a dead level of interest. It rises from the Beginning to a dramatic and emotional climax very near or at the End. This climax does not leave the reader feeling let down, or cheated. It leaves him feeling that he has not wasted his time reading the story; that something happened that was really worthy of his

attention. The only exception to this is in the rare *vignette* and the even rarer short short where a Surprise Ending is achieved by revealing to the reader that the climax is unimportant when he has been led to believe it was important.

Consider this example:

> Mark Biddle gets out his station wagon and drives five miles to the railroad station at Charleston. On the way he thinks that "she" is coming home after a year abroad. Lenore is her name. When she went away he told her she was going to a finishing school to learn many things she would need in the future. There at school she was learning what her beautiful mother had known; the mother who had died giving birth to Lenore. On the continent she had been praised for her talent and had even been noticed by the King. Mark Biddle arrives at the station just as the train does, and sees Lenore—in a crate that is being removed from the baggage car. She is an international champion English setter.[1]

The Ending of the above story is a complete let-down. The reader has been led to expect that Mark Biddle is expecting his daughter, and the emotions the reader feels are correspondingly strong. Not until very near the End does the reader know that a trick has been played on him—that the situation is by no means as important as he has been made to believe. Most readers resent being tricked in this way, and such an ending rarely leaves the reader satisfied and in a happy frame of mind.

Superimposed on this emotion of satisfaction there must, if the writer is to succeed, be other and more specific emotions that the reader feels. In the case of a short short these need not in all cases be what we ordinarily think of as "strong" emotions. *But each should be built to the highest possible point* that the emotion itself permits. Of course not all possible emotions can be listed here, but we shall consider a few of the more important, beginning with the so-called "light" emotions and proceeding to those we think of as "strong" emotions.

1. *Amusement:* Readers enjoy feeling the emotion of amusement. But because amusement is a "light" emotion the story that depends

[1] TRAINTIME by James H. C. Simmons. *American Magazine*, March 1940.

almost altogether on its amusing qualities for interest must be very amusing indeed. Yet now and then a short short is published that arouses almost no other emotion except amusement or, at best, arouses other emotions only incidentally.

2. *Surprise:* Everyone likes to feel the emotion of a *pleasant* surprise. Some short shorts are written that have almost no other emotional value except the surprise at the End.

3. *Recognition:* This is the pleasant emotion felt when a familiar situation played out by familiar characters is shown, always of course with a definite dramatic climax. *Readers like to recognize the familiar.* This pleasure is analogous to the emotion we feel when we see a picture of our old home, or a place we have visited, or meet people we knew long ago. We do not necessarily have to have happy memories of these places or people in order for them to hold our interest. It is only necessary that we *react to them emotionally,* whatever that emotion may be, whether approval or disapproval, liking or dislike.

4. *Pleasure in recognizing the truth of a theme* that the reader already believes, or readily accepts. All of which means that we like people who agree with our opinions and beliefs.

5. *Pleasure in the dramatic presentation* of an unusual belief, standard of conduct, or psychological reaction.

6. *Pleasure in the defeat and punishment* of a wrongdoer.

7. *Pleasure that everything has come out all right* for the main character.

8. *Pleasure that everything has come out in the best possible way under the circumstances.* This is usually the story with the "unhappy" Ending and includes the emotion in the next category.

9. *The emotion of pity,* or sympathy, or admiration, or any combination of these emotions, felt toward the main character. The reader enjoys feeling these emotions more than any other single emotion or emotions in combinations. This is proved by the large number of published short shorts that follow this emotional pattern.

The above is, of course, a partial list of the dominant emotions readers like to feel when they come to the End of a short story. More will be found in Chapter XIX on how to analyze and classify short short stories. You will find it valuable to start a list of your own,

made up of these dominant emotions that readers like to feel. This list will help you to write salable short shorts that are original and different.

When you have, after examining your story material, decided on the dominant emotion or blend of emotions that particular material can most effectively rouse in your reader, *write it down in one sentence.* Don't use a lot of words. The shorter the written statement, the sharper the end you are aiming to achieve will be in your mind.

Now let us turn our attention to the three other types of emotion that will affect your story; emotions that in turn will build the final, emotional experience that your story should create for the reader.

1. *The emotions you as writer feel toward your characters:* Until you know your characters well and feel a distinct emotion toward each one, don't begin to write your story. If you do, your story will be dull and wooden, your characters no more than wax dummies that move only as you push them around. *Think about your characters.* Make them come alive for you. *Take people you know and toward whom you feel appropriate emotions as models for your characters.*

If you have a sweet old aunt who is really a dear but who has some very odd habits, such as putting the pan in which the bacon has been fried on the breakfast table that is otherwise immaculate and daintily set, use her in your story. If you abhor your gruff, unreasonable boss, use him in your story, attributing to him the worst possible motives. Be sure you hate, love, fear, admire, despise, or are merely amused by or interested in the psychological reactions of your characters. But never be indifferent to them. If you are, your reader will be more indifferent to them than you are. And because of your indifference you cannot build a strong emotional effect, without which your story becomes a dull recounting of events and not an emotional experience for your reader.

When you begin to work through your story material, write down the emotion you feel toward each character in your story.

2. *The emotions felt by your characters:* If your characters aren't emotionally moved by their circumstances, their desires and what they want to do, don't expect your reader to care what happens to them. *Emotions are the mainspring of life. A man is what he feels.* If he feels ignoble emotions, he is an ignoble man. If he feels emo-

tions that are admirable, the reader knows he is a good man and likes him—even if he isn't perfect in every way.

Depicting the emotions of short short characters is even more difficult than depicting the emotions of long short characters. First, as we have seen before, presentation in the short short is necessarily simplified to the last possible degree. Therefore, emotions must be shown by one or two swift brush strokes. This is often done while other ends are being accomplished, such as characterization and description or setting as well as action that *carries the story forward.*

The main character in a short short is usually shown as feeling one dominant emotion and, of course, as having one dominant character trait. There is no room in a short short for more than this. So don't scatter your reader's emotional reactions to your story hero by showing that character motivated by more than one emotion. To be specific: If you are writing a story in which a mother is motivated by love for her child, stress that feeling of love and devotion. Don't try to show also that the main character feels love for her parents, hate for an uncle, and fear of her landlord, *unless* these emotions play a part in her love and devotion to her child. Even then they should be given a secondary place.

Example of the emotion of mother-love depicted briefly:

> She picked up her sleeping baby. Sharply conscious of his soft helplessness against her breasts, she reached for his blanket.

Example of how a beginner might write this:

> Her little son had been sleeping for some time. She bent over him, feeling a choking surge of devoted love swell her heart. With trembling hands she reached for his blanket, wrapping it tenderly about him.

In the second example, the reader is *told* and told too much. In the first example sensory appeal is evoked to induce the reader to *re-create within himself* the emotion the mother feels, without *telling* the reader exactly what that emotion is. It is details of presentation such as this that make the difference between non-professional and professional writing, between receiving rejection slips and receiving checks. *Never label an emotion,* or tell the reader what to feel; in-

stead *give him* those *specific details* you have so carefully selected that, in their turn, will create in him the emotion you desire him to feel.

Implied emotion is almost always stronger and more effective than stated emotion. For instance, which of the following passages more strongly communicates to the reader the emotion of contempt felt by the story character?

1. Decker felt deep scorn, even contempt, for Al.

2. "He's dumb," Decker said. "And yellow, to boot. One look at my gun and he'll turn over the cash all right. I'll have no trouble with that lily-livered dim-wit."

I am sure you will say that the second is far more effective in conveying to the reader the emotion Decker feels. Also in creating an emotion in the reader toward Decker, and likewise toward Al. What emotions this passage creates in the reader will be conditioned by what precedes this passage, or what follows it; that is, whether the reader is for Decker or against him. Its greater emotional power stems from the fact that it is dynamic and not static, that it contains other facts pertinent to the story, and that it *apparently* leaves the reader to make up his own mind as to how he reacts emotionally to this character and this situation. In other words, the reader is not *told* what emotion Decker feels, he is *shown.*

When the reader *sees* something, *hears* something, *feels* something, he believes it, accepts it unconditionally, thereby creating his own emotions. But if he is merely *told* something, the effect is weak. There is as much difference in the strength of emotional vibrations set up in the reader's mind by telling and by showing as there is in the strength of ripples started in a lake by tossing a piece of paper to the surface of the water or dropping in a good-sized rock. So, if you as writer feel that you must tell the reader about some emotion a character is feeling, follow that telling with a passage *showing the emotion,* and at the same time fulfilling as many other functions as possible.

Every word, every sentence, every paragraph in a short short has to carry many loads; perform many functions for the story.

Now let us suppose you've written down on the piece of paper on

which you're jotting the *results of your thinking* about the short short you're *planning to write:* The name of the main character (Actor A), the emotion you feel towards him, the emotion he feels, and the emotion you want the reader to feel towards him. The first and the third are probably approximately the same. But the emotion you feel is fully developed, *while the emotion the reader feels must be developed step by step.* One of the first steps toward this end is to show the emotion felt by the main character. That emotion determines for the reader whether the main character is likable or unlikable. In short, there are no gray characters or variegated characters. They are black or white. There is no room in a short short for the many fine details necessary to show a complicated character.

Therefore, in order that the reader may start off with a clear idea of how he is expected to react emotionally to the main character—and to a less degree to the other characters as well—he should be shown or told *at the earliest possible moment* whether the character is a likable character or an unlikable character. This can be done *directly* and also by *using words with subtle connotations.*

For example:

> Mrs. Jackson, comfortably plump and the mother of four children, opened the front door. She smiled encouragingly at the timid young man who stood, hat in hand, facing her. "Do come in," she said, holding the door wide.

The reader knows at once how he is supposed to feel toward Mrs. Jackson. He likes her. Her emotion at the moment is that of warm friendliness. From this paragraph it would appear that her dominant character trait for the story is helpfulness coupled with sympathy.

Now let us see how we can present a woman, in the same situation, in a different light by means of description, emotion, dialogue, action and choice of words:

Example:

> Miss Jackson opened the front door of the down-at-the-heels rooming house that was her threadbare and dusty domain. Her sharp features twisted in a forbidding scowl. "What do *you* want?" she demanded, in a voice that resembled the sound made by a power hack saw with several teeth missing.

The timid young man on the steps shifted his feet and swallowed twice before he could answer.

The reader knows after reading this how he is supposed to feel toward Miss Jackson. Middle-aged spinsters are not so intrinsically appealing to the reader as plump married women who are mothers. The word *home* has pleasing connotations, the word *rooming house* has unpleasant connotations. Cast of countenance, facial expression, sound of voice, her words and the way they are said, all build an emotion in the reader, an emotion of dislike. Miss Jackson appears to be harsh, unfeeling, and rude. The reader *knows* what to expect from her throughout the story.

If your story is planned to arouse the emotions of pity, sympathy and admiration, choose as your main character the specific kind of person for whom it will be easy to arouse these emotions. Of course this kind of a story *can* be written about anyone, but most stories of this type have for their main character an old person who is weak, helpless and brave, or a very young person, even a child, who is weak, helpless and in need of protection—which of course he does not receive. Naturally no story of this type can end "happily." It will end in the best possible way under the circumstances, always with pathos, but almost never with stark tragedy if planned for a general magazine.

If your story is planned to arouse the emotion of satisfaction in the defeat and punishment of an evil-doer, choose as your main character the blackest villain you can create.

If your story is planned to arouse the emotion of satisfaction that everything turns out happily for the main character, choose an Actor A who is thoroughly likable, one whom the reader will actively *want* to be happy.

If your story is planned to arouse the emotion of amusement, don't be satisfied with merely devising an amusing situation. Create a hero for your story who, because of his character traits, temperament, and peculiar psychological twists would naturally and logically create or find himself in this particular amusing situation. In other words, make sure that the emotion of amusement is the outgrowth, not of situation alone, but of *situation that results from character.*

In radio, analogous means of arousing the emotion of amusement

are called gag humor and situation humor. Gag humor, provided it is very clever and has a strong element of surprise, gets a quick laugh and is quickly forgotten. Situation humor, that humor which is a natural outgrowth of character, gets longer laughs, can be sustained longer, and is remembered longer. That is why situation plus character humor is better for short shorts than merely the humor of a funny situation alone.

To recapitulate, *these are the steps to take before actually writing your short short:*

1. List the characters by name and write after each name the emotion you feel towards that character. This will also be the emotion you want the reader to feel towards that character.
2. Write down the emotions each character himself will feel towards the other characters as the story progresses.
3. Write down the dominant character trait of each character from which his emotions spring.
4. Write down the emotion you want your reader to feel about the story as a whole when he arrives at the End.

If you do this simple preparatory work, you will be surprised how much easier it will be to write a clear-cut, well-presented, professional short short with an unmistakable and highly desirable emotional effect.

Method of Study

1. Write a brief characterization of the main character for a short short whose dominant emotional effect will be that of amusement.
2. Same as above, except that the dominant emotional effect of the story written about this character will be one of satisfaction in the defeat and punishment of an evil-doer.
3. Write one paragraph showing—not telling—the reader the emotion or emotions felt by the character, and at the same time giving necessary information and moving the story along. Do this in as brief a form as possible, trying to make every word carry two or three loads.
4. Write a paragraph about someone in action whom you want the reader to dislike only mildly. (This will be a minor character,

of course, since if it were the main character you would want the reader to dislike him very much.)

5. Write three themes that you think will make good starting points for short short theme stories.
6. Create a character about whom you believe you can write a short short designed to arouse the emotion in the reader of sympathy and admiration.

CHAPTER XV

How To Cut, Condense and Polish Your Short Short

PRACTICALLY all writers have difficulty at first in revising their own work, giving it those final touches that so often bridge the gap between a rejection slip and a check. But after a little practice, and *with a sound method to guide them,* the task of revision soon becomes the most pleasant part of writing a story. The hard work, the struggle, is over; *what remains is bringing out the beauty and meaning of the story.* The problems to be solved now are narrowed down, compact, and are challenges to the writer's ingenuity and skill.

The task of revision will become progressively easier if the writer will observe the following precautions *before he actually begins* to work on the last draft of his story.

1. When the manuscript is completed, but before you begin to polish, put it aside and wait for whatever length of time is necessary for the story to become "cold"; that is for the writer, as completely as possible, to become free from the mood of the story. Some can do this in a few hours, others require weeks. Experiment until you find out what length of time works best for you.

One way of "freeing" yourself from the story just finished is to start another. The complete change of thought will disentangle you, the writer, mentally and emotionally, more quickly and thoroughly than any other method I know.

2. When you are ready to revise your story, make up your mind to approach it *objectively* and *critically,* knowing the story has flaws and

determined to find and eliminate every one. Keep this mood of critical objectivity. If you find yourself becoming emotionally involved in the story, as you should have been and undoubtedly were when you were writing it, stop at once and put the story aside for a longer cooling-off period. Emotion nullifies the critical faculty. *Knowledge and judgment must be fully operative at this point.* Be sure they are, then use them to their fullest capacity and power.

You have probably used some of the following methods for cutting, condensing and polishing as you wrote your story, but it is wise to check and *make sure you have left nothing undone,* overlooked nothing. *Remember that cutting a story isn't just a matter of taking out a few words here and there.* To actually shorten a story is to slash the fabric itself.

Now let us examine possible danger spots where cutting and finally polishing may give your story greater simplicity, clarity and force:

1. *TIME LAPSE AND NUMBER OF SCENES*

See if you can shorten the time lapse of your story. Ask yourself these questions:

(a) Is it possible or advisable for me to begin this story nearer the end, thus eliminating what is now the opening scene?

(b) If I have not told my story in a single setting and a single scene, is it possible for me to do so?

(c) If that is not feasible, is it possible for me to delete one or more scenes in my story?

(d) Is there one or more scenes in my story that can be presented more effectively in narrative form?

Remember, it *is not necessary* that your short short have a brief time lapse, or be presented in one scene. But it *is necessary* that your short short be given the shortest possible time lapse and the fewest number of scenes the material will allow.[1]

You can determine what parts of your short short to present in dramatic scenes and what in narration, by *examining your material for the main dramatic crises,* or turning points in the story. Naturally

[1] SALES TALK, summarized in Chapter V, has a time lapse of perhaps thirty minutes, perhaps less, and is told in one scene. FOUND MONEY, summarized in Chapter II, has a time lapse of about a year, and is told in four scenes, the rest of the action being covered by swift, dynamic narration.

these must be presented in scenes, the rest in the very best dramatic narration you are capable of writing.

2. *CHARACTERS*

Have you included more characters than are necessary to present your story? Perhaps your main character has a mother and a sister, both of whom are trying to help him. Try combining the two into one character. But suppose the mother is a help, the sister a hindrance. In that case it may be possible for you to combine one or the other of these women with a more important character in the story. Or you may endow the main character with a dual personality, one side presenting the viewpoint of the woman most easily eliminated. Sometimes a character who seems at first glance to be absolutely essential to the plot development, can, after more careful consideration, be combined with another character, or taken out entirely. *An unnecessary character is fatal to the success of a short short.*

Perhaps, and this often happens, you have a character in your story whom you like very much, but all he does is to bring information, or carry a message, or act as a sounding board for purposes of dialogue, so the main character won't have to talk to himself to get necessary information over to the reader. It will be hard to do, and you won't like to do it one bit, but your story will be better if you remove this character entirely.

Check every character *to be sure he carries a part of the plot load that cannot be allotted to any other character* or presented in one of the many forms of narration.

3. *DESCRIPTION AND CHARACTERIZATION*

When describing either settings or characters, be sure you include nothing but what is necessary to the plot of the story. Don't describe the beauties of the full moon illuminating the scene, unless the fact that the moon is there *is a necessary factor* in the story. Don't describe a man as tall, stoop-shouldered, and wearing a threadbare suit with gravy spots on his vest *unless the characteristics indicated by that description play an important part in the plot development.* A good rule to remember always is *don't tell the reader, show him in action.*

4. *INFORMATION*

Question every item of information that you have given the reader, giving special attention to the statements of what happened before

the story started, the background of your characters, and so on. *Tell only what is absolutely necessary.* For example, in the story, MEANEST MAN, cited in Chapter IV, the reader is told that the man's wife has been dead five years, and ever since she has been dead he has been mean. At the point where this information is given, it seems to have no bearing on the story, but it tells the reader that the man was not always mean, and implies that grief and loneliness is at the root of his meanness. It is a *plant* that works itself out in the End when he is no longer mean. Meanness is the only *characteristic* assigned to this man, because it is the only one involved in the plot development of this short short.

Go through your own story and when you come to a sentence giving information, ask yourself the following questions regarding it:

(a) Must the reader know this in order to understand the story?

(b) Can I get this information to the reader more deftly and in a fewer number of words?

For example, your heroine may be an orphan, has received her education in a convent, be one of twin sisters and passionately fond of French pastry. All very interesting, but if these facts do not vitally affect the development of your story, *leave them out.* Don't spend your time and the time of the reader establishing one fact, however small, that is *unnecessary to your story.*

But suppose that the girl's excessive fondness for French pastry does affect your plot. Get that fact into your story as quickly, as briefly, and as interestingly as possible. Maybe the reader sees her with delight eating her favorite dessert. Maybe another character says, "I never knew a girl so fond of French pastry as Merilee." The point I want to make is, *don't waste your time and the time of the reader establishing even one small fact that isn't going to work out later in your story.*

5. *DIALOGUE*

It is imperative that you go over your dialogue with a fine-tooth comb. Ask yourself these questions:

Is the dialogue "natural" or does the character go on endlessly in a speech paragraphs long?

Is the dialogue in keeping with the character? In other words, would such a person talk like that?

Does the dialogue *build* the story or is it just unnecessary words on a page?

Does the dialogue *show* the emotional state of the speaker?

Is it his *individual tempo?*

Am I remembering that "natural" dialogue is broken and fragmentary?

Am I remembering that all dialogue must have the *illusion of reality* but a *significance* that most real-life dialogue doesn't have?

And finally, is the dialogue *interesting in itself?* In other words, does it sparkle? Will the reader *enjoy reading it?*

If you will ask yourself the above questions and *apply* them to your own writing of dialogue, you will be amazed at the wordage you'll cut. And with what excellent results.

While we are on the subject of *cutting* wordage in dialogue, there is an effective device that I have stolen from the legitimate stage—"telephonic" conversation. This can be used occasionally to give the reader the *illusion* of natural dialogue and yet its purpose is to give the audience certain necessary information about the play characters. Many's the time on the stage you've seen a character dash in from the wings to answer a jangling phone, and by the one-way conversation over the phone you've received all the information of a two-way conversation.

Now how can we use this "telephonic" device and get rid of real-life boring conversation in our story and yet retain the *illusion* of reality, still giving the reader certain information that he needs to know?

Here's an example of "telephonic" conversation from a story:

> "No, I'm not tired. . . . Oh, I'll be home a long time this trip. . . . Bill? . . . Bill's fine . . ."

And here's the *boring reality* of such conversation:

> "Are you tired?"
> "No, I'm not tired."
> "Are you going to stay home long?"
> "Oh, I'll be home a long time this trip."
> "How's Bill?"
> "Bill's fine."

Now don't overdo the use of this device in your writing, but it does have its *occasional* use, and, incidentally, we have 16 words in the first instead of 27 in the second. How is that for cutting? Also we're agreed on which is the more interesting.

6. *IMPRESSIONISTIC WRITING*

There seems to be a mistaken notion among people that we remember in whole sentences instead of just in brief snatches or fragments of words *that are ideas.* For instance, we remember the tragic death of a friend by drowning on a cold day at the beach. We remember her tangled wet hair. But do we *think* in terms of *all these words* when we remember? We don't. Instead we *see* in our memory's eye certain definite images that are conveyed by nouns and adjectives or verbs and adverbs:

> Gray day . . . upturned boat . . . Ellen's wet face . . .

There isn't a complete sentence in the lot, yet these *fragments* convey the mood, the setting, the tragedy. . . .

As with "telephonic" conversation, so I repeat here, *don't overuse* fragmentary, impressionistic writing. It is especially helpful in conveying to the reader necessary information of past happenings and their *mood,* the memory of which will become the springboard of motivation for some subsequent *action* of the character that, in turn, will bring about *an important crisis* in the story. But don't write your whole story this way.

7. *THE MANY-FUNCTIONED SENTENCE*

The beginning writer too often writes a single idea to a sentence. He seems so utterly unaware that a single sentence can give not only *direct information* but also can convey so much more to the reader *by implication.*

For example:

> Leonard's cowlick was temporarily banished under the drive of his aunt's indefatigable hairbrush.[2]

How many functions does this sentence serve? We get a living picture of the boy, his youth, his name, his appearance, the "temporary"

[2] From a class assignment in Directed Writing, by Robert Henney.

flattening down of that cowlick that tells us so much of his robust vitality. We feel he's "all boy" and there's rebellion when he gets his hair brushed; we get the aunt's character, her determination, her conscientiousness; we see her spare, severe figure, and feel that the home is scrupulously clean. In all probability there's little enough of worldly goods, but there's thrift and honesty and a determination on the part of the aunt to bring up young Leonard "in the way he should go"—to be a credit to his family and an honorable citizen. Somehow or other I feel it's a farm community. How much more do you get out of that sentence? You see what I mean by *writing by implication,* don't you? And how it saves actual wordage?

Of course it takes much thought and careful planning to make every sentence serve many functions and yet not be burdened with information. As we have seen in the sentence quoted above no matter how many functions it serves and how many times carefully worked over and revised, *it must read with the fluency and ease and spontaneity and tempo* of a sentence that has *just been dashed off* that way.

All of which means, you and I agree, that *easy reading is hard writing.* But if you're going to be afraid of work in your writing, you had better go no farther. What we're actually doing is "sculpturing" in words.

8. *TIGHTENING THE SENTENCE*

While we are on the subject of the sentence, let me say a final word about "tightening" its structure. Watch out for sheer *wordiness* in your sentences. Often in revision of manuscripts how I've wished for a string to tighten up the sentence length and so get rid of all the word-puckers! Scan every clause and modifying phrase with a critical eye. Do you need *all those words,* or is it just the simple adjective or adverb that is important? It isn't that I want you to write in a clipped telegraphic style—decidedly the reverse is the case. But in order to meet today's editorial demands, *we must learn to condense* as well as to cut. And to condense drastically!

In most cases, condensing isn't a matter of eliminating necessary material, it's just a matter of the script going on a rigid diet, as it were, and losing excess poundage (verbiage). Often, you will find when a paragraph is "wordy," that *the thought* you are *trying to express isn't quite clear in your own mind;* hence, that "wordiness" is in reality a *groping* for the elusive, perhaps even obscure, idea.

9. *STOWAWAY WORDS*

Stowaway words are words that do not pay their passage *by doing something for your story.* When looking for these words in your short short you will find it helpful to keep specific types of words in mind. When you know *where* to look and *what* to look for, your task is much easier. Until you become skillful in spotting stowaway words, it is a good plan to go through your story hunting for one kind at a time. After long practice you will become so sensitive to them that you may be able to get them all out at one reading.

Check your story for the following stowaway words:

(a) *Unnecessary adjectives*

Keep your adjectives to an absolute minimum. Rarely more than two should be applied to one noun. In most cases, one is quite sufficient. Don't say: "The bright, clear, sunny, invigorating spring day gave new energy and added life to Kate's swift, hurrying footsteps."

Instead, write something like this: "The bright spring day gave new energy to Kate's hurrying footsteps."

You do not add to an effect by tacking on a string of adjectives, no matter how well-chosen they may be—you detract from the effect you are trying to create. Nor do you emphasize your meaning by using two adjectives that mean nearly if not quite the same thing. Don't say, as a writer did in a manuscript that came to my desk yesterday, "She laid her tired, weary head on the pillow." Say either *tired,* or *weary;* not both. One or the other is a stowaway word.

(b) *Unnecessary adverbs*

Watch the adverbs; those words that qualify and condition verbs. They are always creeping in, stealing a free ride if they can. For example, don't say, "He went slowly, fearfully and dejectedly down the stairs." That is too much for the reader to visualize as showing the way he walked down stairs. Much better say, "He went dejectedly down the stairs." The word *dejectedly* carries with it the connotation of slow movement. If you must say he was fearful, put the idea in another sentence.

(c) *That word "very"*

The qualifying word *very* calls for a sub-heading of its own, because of the frequency with which it appears as a stowaway word. It is a word you can almost always cut out and in so doing improve the sentence in which you find it. "Very" means almost nothing, in most

cases, because it may mean anything. When you say a man is "very angry," the reader has no way of knowing precisely what you mean. You may intend to convey the meaning that he is "highly irritated," or "extremely angry," or "furiously angry," or "murderously angry," or any one of a number of other degrees of anger.

Think precisely, visualize clearly, and you will find that the word "very" seldom pays its passage, and, like most stowaway words, tends to weaken the sentence in which it appears. "Only," "just," "then," and "merely" belong in the same category.

(d) *Unnecessary connectives*

The first time you try it, you are almost sure to be surprised at the number of connectives you can cut out of your story—and also how greatly their removal will speed the tempo and increase the interest. The most common connectives to appear profusely in the work of beginning writers are: "and," "but," "so," "because," "therefore." These words are valuable, but only when used properly and with restraint.

Example of the unrestrained use of connectives:

> John came home for lunch, but Peggy wasn't expecting him, and besides she was making a dress, so she was quite put out and told John he would have to get his own lunch and he did.

Perhaps *in your story* you may not find a sentence so badly constructed as this one. Although I assure you that similar and even longer sentences often appear in the manuscripts of beginning writers. You are, however, almost certain to find connectives that should be cut, so that your sentences will not contain more than one main idea and one—or at most, two—dependent clauses. Don't be afraid to use periods, they are the writer's best friend.

Now let us see how the above sentence can be rewritten so as to leave out the stowaway connectives:

> John came home unexpectedly for lunch. Peggy was making a dress and was quite put out when she saw him. She told John he would have to get his own lunch. He did . . . and hers too.

(e) *Those charming and beautiful phrases and paragraphs*

No doubt these are beautifully written. You love them, and rightly.

But *do they move your story forward,* unfold the plot? If not, take them out. Read your short short again. You will discover with a feeling of joyful surprise that your story is far stronger, more appealing and more interesting than it was before.

After you have cut your story, the next job is to polish and repolish until your story has the length, the tempo and the smooth quality of presentation that editors demand. After you have revised several of your own short shorts, following the suggestions made in this chapter, you will almost certainly never again dread this phase of writing. Instead, you will look forward to the job of polishing your presentation as a pleasant climax to your effort, where you will almost *see* your story grow and become crystal-clear before your eyes.

Of course you know that this chapter has told you how to cut, condense and polish *everything you'll ever write*—regardless of its form.

Method of Study

1. Take a published short short that you like and feel is well written. Go through it paragraph by paragraph, sentence by sentence, word by word. Determine what, if anything, could be taken out and still leave the story intact and effective.
2. Take a short short of your own and go through it, looking for anything you can take out without detracting from the *story itself.* Use the sub-headings of this chapter as a guide.

Part IV

TYPES OF SHORT SHORTS

CHAPTER XVI

Short Shorts of Different Lengths

In the field of the short short, there are four distinct divisions with sharp lines of demarcation between them. Unless you know what these length groups are you may write a story that fits into none of them, and so fail to sell it no matter how good the story may be. Or you may fail to sell it because you have slanted your story to a magazine or group of magazines that never use that particular length of short short at all.

In this chapter we shall discuss only those short shorts slanted for the top, smooth-paper general-interest magazines. In Chapters XVII & XVIII we discuss short shorts slanted toward magazines in other fields.

The names given to stories in each of the four length divisions of the short short field are as follows: The *vignette,* the *storiette,* the regular *short short,* and the *condensed short.*

If you happen to have in your mind the idea that the creative writer should never accept word or space limitations, now is the time to eradicate that idea from your consciousness once and for all. *The greatest artists are those who accept and use and take advantage of the most rigid limitations of their media.* Poets accept the most rigid word and space limitations of any literary artists, but their limitations have not kept them from writing immortal verse. On the contrary, in all probability their artistry is stronger because of those very limitations as, for instance, the sonnet.

Compared with the poet, the fiction writer has practically unlimited freedom. Besides, he is not compelled to accept any word or space

limitation. If you are a genius you can probably write a short short in fifty words or a book that consumes six hundred thousand words, and sell either or both. But most of us aren't geniuses. We're people who have talent and who are working diligently to acquire craftsmanship—with varying success. And so, if we want to publish what we write—*we try to find out what editors want.* Editors have decided ideas about the length of the short shorts that they will buy, and they don't all have the same ideas. Perhaps this seems like a situation of confusion but in reality it is quite simple.

All you have to do is count the words in the short shorts printed in a dozen issues of any one magazine, and segregate the stories according to their length into the four categories we shall examine in a moment. Then you will know what length the editor likes best, what length he likes least, and what length he doesn't like at all—for his magazine. Of course, as you are reading these stories you will note many more things about them than their length, but just now we are emphasizing the *word count* of short shorts.

1. THE VIGNETTE

The *vignette is the short short in its briefest form.* The shortest vignette I have ever seen is two hundred and twenty-seven words in length, and the longest is six hundred words. There may be shorter and longer ones, but if so they have not come to my attention. The market for *vignettes* is extremely limited as only a very small number of the top smooth-paper general-interest magazines use them. However, the pay is good and the prestige that the sale of a *vignette* brings to a beginning writer is a not inconsiderable part of his reward.

While it is true that the market is limited, the competition is not so keen as in the next two length divisions of the short short. One reason for this lessened competition is that professionals do not often think it worth their while to write the *vignette.* With their skill in manipulating literary material, building it up, adding complications and obstacles, they find it easy to take an idea that might serve as a basis for a vignette and use it as the foundation for a longer story—still perhaps within the family of short shorts—for which they will receive a much greater compensation than for even the most extraordinary *vignette.*

I especially recommend the *vignette* form to the beginning and

semi-professional writer because of the *excellent training it offers* in *selecting a suitable idea*, in *organizing material*, and in *presenting the idea in the irreducible minimum of words.* Words that must necessarily be selected with the greatest care.

The beginner is not discouraged by the length of the task before him, as he may well be when he first attempts the longer forms of story writing. He is not tempted to follow lines of interest, because if he has selected a suitable idea he *will not have even one secondary line of interest.* His story will be simple and told in one direct line. He should be able to complete a *vignette* in a day, though of course no time can be set for the completion of any creative work. Sometimes a *vignette* will require a long period of working over in the subconscious mind before the final clear-cut story emerges. *There can be no set rule about any form of creation.*

Even a brief survey of published *vignettes* shows that they vary in form, content, and effect almost as much as do other short shorts and even long shorts. There is almost no limit to the *kind* of *vignette* you may write. Some are fully plotted PURPOSE PATTERN stories, either ACCOMPLISHMENT, or the BITER-BIT type. I have yet to see a vignette that is a DECISION story. The reason probably is the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of showing a character swaying between two courses of action within the word limits of this form. But, nevertheless, a DECISION *vignette* may be published at any time.

Many *vignettes* are of the OFF-PATTERN variety, presenting an interesting situation, an unusual belief, and so on, or building an emotional effect, just as any short short may do.

Vignettes, as a group, differ from other short shorts in that they almost always have a Surprise Ending. The few that do not end with a surprise build strong admiration and sympathy for the main character. The Surprise Endings of the *vignette* may be, like the Surprise Endings of other stories, the revelation of an unknown factor, the *means* by which the problem was solved or *how* it was solved, an unusual belief or psychological twist, the true situation, and so on. Regardless of the surprise ending, most *vignettes build to a strong emotional climax.*

Vignettes are told chronologically and with the shortest possible time lapse. In most of them the story takes place in a few minutes. If you think that a strong, appealing story cannot happen in a few

minutes, read a dozen or so vignettes in *American Magazine.* Unless you are the cynical, hard-boiled type, you will have read several that moved you to feel the emotions of amusement, surprise, sympathy, admiration and many others. Many *vignettes*—almost all of them, in fact—give the reader a satisfying emotional experience and so have accomplished their end. The end for which they were written.

There is no time and no words in a *vignette* for flashbacks and very little for changing scenes. Most *vignettes* have complete unity of place and time, requiring only one setting.

Once in a great while you will find one that ends in an anti-climax; one where everything has been sacrificed for a surprise that is a wrenching shock rather than a pleasant sensation. I do not know why editors publish these stories, because I have never yet found a reader who liked them. The surprise is that the situation, which has been built up as important, is not at all important. This is poor fiction technique indeed; using a device that makes a fool of the reader in order to surprise him. (See TRAINTIME, Chapter XIV).

Once in a great while you will find a *vignette* that is a tiny, polished, richly colored jewel fashioned with exquisite artistry. These are the *vignettes* you should take as your models, both for basic idea and for presentation, remembering that to use something as a model is not to copy it. *A model is useful only as it stirs the imagination to create something original.* You may not be able at first to reach the high standard of the best vignettes, yet if you but approach it you will sell your work.

The writing of the *vignette* is the finest possible exercise for the inexperienced and semi-professional writer. *Vignettes* are more interesting than fragments of stories such as bits of dialogue, characterizations, descriptions or even complete scenes, because each one is complete in itself; a compact, finished story. They require, as do longer stories, a sound story idea developed to a dramatic climax, setting, characterization, emotion and so on. The power and emotional impact of a *vignette* should be as strong as that of a longer story, while the means of getting this effect are enormously simplified and scaled down to a diminutive size.

Summary of a typical *vignette:*

A general is addressing his Planning Board. He congratulates a newly-made Colonel on his promotion from the rank of Major. He says that the Colonel comes from a family of proud military tradition and he knows the Colonel will continue to carry on that tradition. He then returns to the subject the Planning Board have previously discussed, known as Mission 408X. The leader of this mission will be in almost no danger, but the lives of three Divisions will depend on his clear thinking and ability to make wise, quick decisions. He has, he says, chosen Captain Dorel as leader of Mission 408X.

The newly promoted Colonel rises. He says that he feels it is his duty to inform the Board that Captain Dorel has been secretly drinking to excess for some time and so is not the man to be trusted with Mission 408X. The General then names someone else to the post.

All leave the room except the Colonel. A staff sergeant enters and says, "Colonel Dorel, your son, the Captain, is on the phone." [1]

Now let us reduce this *vignette* to its *story-essentials,* which are not conditioned, or even colored by the military background of the story.

Basic idea: Adherence to duty at great personal sacrifice.

Pattern: PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by means of moral courage.

Purpose of Actor A for the story: To do his duty and uphold the tradition of his family. In spite of the painful and humiliating consequences to himself.

Surprise ending: The revelation of a factor unknown to the reader until the last lines of the last paragraph: that Captain Dorel is the Colonel's son. This gives the story its strong emotional significance.

Emotional effect of the story as a whole: Sympathy and admiration for Colonel Dorel.

The *number of words* in this vignette is 425.

As you see, the basic idea of this *vignette* is equally suitable for development as a storiette, a short short, a condensed short or a long short, *the length of the story being determined by the number of plot complications.* Not all vignettes have basic ideas that are suitable for development in the longer story forms, but the more satisfactory ones do possess such basic ideas. So when you plan a *vignette,* make sure that *its basic idea is significant* and one that can be presented dramatically and with strong emotional values.

[1] GREAT HONOR by Tom Curry. *American Magazine,* January 1943.

2. THE STORIETTE

The *storiette* has a minimum of seven hundred words and a maximum of eight hundred and fifty words. It differs from the *vignette* only in that the additional length permits the use of material that is a little more complicated, or that necessitates more characterization. The market for *storiettes* is even more limited than for *vignettes*. The *storiette* doesn't fill a magazine page unless a large illustration is used with it. To leave space for other printed material on the page, it must be set up in small type. Only two or three magazines of the general type we are now considering use short shorts of this length.

It would serve no purpose to give a summary of a storiette, since short shorts of this length require the same material and the same treatment as the regular short short, many of which have already been summarized in previous chapters.

3. THE REGULAR SHORT SHORT

The regular short short has a minimum of nine hundred words and a maximum of seventeen hundred words, the most salable lengths being approximately one thousand and seventeen hundred words. These are good lengths for the editor, giving him a little leeway, as, allowing for one small illustration, the story can be put on one page. Or by dressing up the title and using a larger illustration it can comfortably fill two pages.

A well-written, interesting story kept within these word limits has practically an unlimited market. If for any reason it doesn't make one of the top markets there are many secondary magazines that are wide open to the unknown writer and that pay well. If the story still doesn't find a home, there remains the enormous field of less important markets that pay well enough to make the writing of a story worth while for the beginner and the semi-professional writer.

In the secondary markets you will still have to meet the competition of the professional writers as they often invade this field. But in the third-class markets, such as some newspaper syndicates, all trade journals, professional and business organs, etc., you will be competing only with beginning writers and semi-professionals. Therefore, your chances of selling will be correspondingly greater since not many con-

tributors to this field will have the knowledge of technique that you will have after you have carefully studied this book.

The demand for short shorts of the one thousand to twelve hundred word length is greater than the supply. You will be paid much more per word for them than you will receive for a long short of comparable quality. But to make the top markets they must be written with a professional style, and presented with an original, fresh slant. Timeliness is also a great asset, though it is not required that the timeliness be stressed.

Again, no summary of a regular short short is necessary to show you what kind of material or what treatment to use, because of the many summaries of short shorts of this length that have already been given throughout other chapters of this book.

4. THE CONDENSED SHORT

This type of short short has a minimum of about eighteen hundred words and a maximum of about twenty-five hundred words. The market for the condensed short has been limited in the past, but new publications are being rapidly opened to it. It may now be seen occasionally in almost any top magazine; while the smaller secondary magazines, because of less space for fiction, favor it above the long short of three thousand words or more. *It is my belief that this length of short short will enjoy a rapidly increasing popularity.*

Because of its length, it is an attractive story to write and a pleasant one to read. The canvas is a little larger than in any other short short length, and so gives the writer a little more room to move about, to do richer characterizations, to use characters, and give more color through the use of specific details and sensory appeals. Of course these added advantages entail greater responsibilities on the part of the writer. In a short short of this length he must have something significant to say, over and above the actual story he tells. The story must have as much actual significance as would be required of a story of four to six thousand words.

A condensed short may be any kind of story at all. It may be a romance, a problem story, an adventure story, the presentation of an interesting situation, an interesting character, and so on indefinitely. It may be a plotted pattern story or it may be off-pattern. Its only re-

quirements are that it be well-written, interesting, developed dramatically to a logical climax, and that it have significance. And, of course, it must conform to the requirements of the magazine, or group of magazines, toward which you have slanted it.

Here is the summary of a short short that is worthy of study:

> Mr. Church, an elementary physics teacher, is instructing a class of boys. He is middle-aged, has taught this same subject in this same school for many years. He is receiving stupid replies to his questions from one of the boys, the same type of stupid replies that he gets from every new class. The futility and dullness of his life engulf him. He goes off into a long dream, (which the reader does not know is a dream until very near the end of the story), of walking from the room, insulting the principal of the school, and leaving his old life behind him. He goes to a bus station, buys a ticket for the next bus leaving. He gets off on a country road, wanders through woods and fields in freedom and happiness, the author giving a great variety of specific detail and sensory appeals. At last, however, Mr. Church finds himself back in the schoolroom . . . which he has never actually left, replying patiently to the confused student, repeating the explanations he has made so many times before to other classes, other boys . . .[2]

The story loses much in a summary, because it is not so much a story of plot, as a psychological story presenting a state of mind—rebellion against monotony and futility—that most people have experienced at some time in their lives. Note that the significance of the story is expressed in the title.

Whatever length short short you plan to write, *think about it, plan it, give it the best you have.* Write it sincerely, out of your own heart. You may have the cleverest plot or idea in the world, but if your story written around that plot, or idea, doesn't enable the reader to recreate the emotion you feel about that story, then you have failed. To be sure, you may possibly sell the story. Many poor short shorts are sold. The demand is so great that editors cannot be too particular about what they buy. But merely selling his story is not all that a

[2] ROUND AND ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH by Anthony Dunn. *Esquire,* April 1946.

sincere writer wants. He wants to feel that his work is good; that it will create an answering emotion in other hearts, the hearts of his readers, so that they will enjoy his story and remember it.

That feeling is the writer's *real reward;* not the check he receives.

Method of Study

1. What are the four length divisions in the short short field? Name each. Approximate minimum and maximum length?
2. What is the most salable length for short shorts? Why?
3. Should a *vignette* be told chronologically or with flashbacks? Why?
4. Give a one-paragraph summary of an original *vignette.*
5. Give two advantages of the condensed short from the writer's point of view.
6. Write a brief summary of an original condensed short. Tell why you think you need the word-length of the condensed short to properly tell the story. State in one sentence the dominant emotion you want your reader to feel at the end of your story. State in one sentence the theme, or significance, of the story.

CHAPTER XVII

The Literary Short Short

THE short shorts we shall discuss now are called *literary*, because they are published in a group of publications loosely designated as "literary" magazines. Remember that the name, "literary short short" does not in all cases represent a fact, as by no means all the stories published in the *literary* magazines can be classified by a competent and unbiased observer as literature. Furthermore, it is well to remember that short shorts, deserving to be classified in this category, appear with reasonable frequency in the big, smooth-paper magazines—even sometimes in the secondary and regional publications. For all these reasons, we shall understand that the phrase, "literary short short," as we use it here, designates a story that has been published in one of a specific group of magazines. These magazines, while not entirely alike in their requirements, have certain salient characteristics in common.

A few of the magazines in this *literary* group are *Harper's Magazine, Atlantic Monthly, The New Yorker, Esquire, Harper's Bazaar,* and *Coronet.* One of the more permanent "little magazines," is *Prairie Schooner,* published quarterly by the University of Nebraska Press. Incidentally, a number of our Universities and large Colleges publish little literary magazines.

Before we look with an analytical eye at the literary short shorts, we should examine the field as a whole. A cursory examination may leave an impression that the editors have no settled policy as to what they will print. To a certain degree, this is true. That is to say, they do not demand a certain format or treatment; they have fewer taboos

than the general circulation magazines. Yet a long and careful survey shows that these literary editors do look for clear-cut qualities in the stories they buy.

Generally speaking, they buy only the stories that are *different; that show greater originality, greater insight into the psychology of human beings,* and more penetrating analysis of human actions and of conditions in the world than is required for stories aimed at other publications. The various *literary* magazines differ slightly in the types of stories they like best, their subject matter and their presentation. The writer who wishes to submit his work to one or more of them, should study the magazine or magazines of his choice with great care. Only in this way can he know what the editors are looking for and what they are likely to accept.

A word about trends in the literary field may prove helpful at this point. Here, *trends change more rapidly* and *more completely* than is usually the case in the general magazine field. A very few years ago, the literary magazines were, almost without exception, publishing a very large number of stories that were pure fantasy. Now, almost no stories of fantasy are appearing. Yet the editors continue to receive countless fantasies submitted by aspiring writers who have not read recent issues of the magazines and are therefore unaware that the trend has swung far away from this type of story.

The now-outmoded stories actually dealt with such matters as the problems the Virgin Mary had as one of the head angels in heaven, of two wax dummies in a Fifth Avenue window, of a kitten, a cat and a mouse, what happens on a trip to the moon, dream sequences of the wildest order, and so on. This type of fantasy appears no longer to be in favor, though highly imaginative stories, if they are built on a factual foundation and create an illusion of reality, are occasionally used.

As illustration of the imaginative, yet factually based, short short, I give you the following:

> A man falls asleep and dreams that he has a long talk with an entity who introduces himself as the Splintered Atom. The conversation that ensues is a logical, if somewhat zany discussion of present-day conditions on earth and what may grow out of them. There is none of the disconnection between ideas and between sequences that characterize the real dream state. When the conversation is

> finished, the man awakes. The device of the dream appears to have been used in order to avoid the form of straight fantasy. A few years ago, the man would have met and conversed with the Splintered Atom without the device of the dream.[1]

As you can see, this story is not actually fantasy, having avoided that quality by an extremely narrow margin, by using the dream device.

The present-day trend in the literary magazines is toward social significance and problems of humanity, though of course not all the stories are of this type. Many present individual problems and experiences, nearly always unusual. It is extremely difficult to generalize concerning literary short shorts, because the important quality, the quality that first of all makes them attractive to the editors, is that of difference, or originality in both subject and presentation.

Sometimes a writer for the literary magazine will select a simple character in a familiar setting, and by his skillful presentation give the story great significance and strong emotional appeal.

A brief summary of such a story follows:

> Miss Sheila Smink lives in a small Eastern college town. She works buttonholes to support herself and her aged mother, receiving two cents a buttonhole for some, five cents for more difficult ones. There was almost no time in her life for anything except buttonholes. Miss Smink's shabby home, her appearance, tools, clothing, and so on, are described in great detail. The story is almost entirely narration. In the last paragraph Miss Smink, sitting on her porch, watches two lovers walk into the light of the arc lamp before her home, and pass hand in hand into the shadows beyond. She turns, goes slowly into the house to work more buttonholes.[2]

The simplicity of this story might lead an unanalytical person to believe it is easy to write a similar story. Actually, it is far from easy, requiring as it does *great sensitivity in the writer*, along with skill in the choice of words and the building of phrases that create the desired effect. The over-all effect of this story is great pity and sympathy for

[1] JUST FIFTEEN MINUTES MORE, PLEASE by Leland Stowe. *Esquire*, June 1946.
[2] BUTTONHOLES by Ben Hur Lampman. Specially featured in *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1946. Reprinted in Appendix.

Miss Sheila Smink, and for all others like her in the world; the little people who do their simple tasks to the very best of their ability as they live barren, monotonous lives.

Here is a summary of another story of the same general type and by the same author.

> Rosy keeps a filling station and small auto court left by her father. She is young, has soft blond hair, lovely gray eyes, and a beautiful coloring in her round cheeks. These could be seen, if one looked twice, but no one did, because Rosy was fat. Rosy is lonely and she has never been out of the county. She dreams of adventure, of seeing the far places named on the license plates of the cars that stop at her filling station . . . and then drive away, because no one ever looks at Rosy twice. One day a young man with a Texas license plate on his car, *does* look twice at Rosy. He sees how lovely she is, and takes her away with him.[3]

This is really a story, whereas BUTTONHOLES is a sketch. The action rises to a crisis and climax near the end, and at the close of the story the characters are in a different relationship to each other from that existing at the Beginning.

For the most part, the writers of literary short shorts are not professional writers in the usually accepted meaning of the term. That is, they do not earn their living, or even an appreciable part of their living, by writing fiction. They are well educated, widely read, exceptionally talented amateurs. They know little, if anything, about writing technique, except from the standpoint of appreciation. Naturally this is altogether different from knowing the technique of writing from the creative side. These contributors to the literary magazines are seldom—with certain notable exceptions—able to make the top general-interest magazines. This is not because they write too well, but because they do not write well enough. Why? Their work does not have the clarity, the fine organization and, most important of all, the significance, that is the mark of true literature, of all literature that lives. This is not to say that truly fine and truly admirable stories are not published in the literary magazines. Not at all. On the contrary there are many of them. But generally speaking, most

[3] THE GIRL AT THE FILLING STATION by Ben Hur Lampman. *Atlantic*, June 1944. Reprinted in Appendix.

of the stories appearing in these publications, however beautifully written they may be, are merely incidents, or fragments, rather than actual short shorts.

Many are as stylized as modernistic plastic furniture, or, in some cases, as a painting by Salvador Dali.

The usual writer of the literary short short is too often a one-story writer. He has a brilliant, original, perhaps bizarre idea (though bizarre ideas are not as much in vogue as formerly). Taking full advantage of his inborn talent for weaving a spell with words, he writes an impressionistic story and it is accepted—by a *literary* magazine. This proves to him that writers are born, not made. He does not have to learn to be a writer. God, in His infinite wisdom, made him one. He writes another story and his disillusionment begins. He has no idea what it was that sold this first story. He does not know how to repeat that first brilliant performance. So, only rarely does he ring the gong again, even in the little literary magazines.

If you doubt this, try to think of the names of writers that appear over and over in by-lines in the magazines we are discussing. Yes, you will think of such names as Roark Bradford, Dorothy Thomas, Wallace Stegner, John Steinbeck, William Saroyan. But you will also see these names in the big, top-quality general-circulation magazines. These writers, following their initial success in the literary field, have mastered fiction technique, have disciplined and trained their great talents, so that they have been able to succeed and *sell regularly* to the general-circulation magazines. And are read by millions. They know that to be both famous and rewarded liberally for their excellent stories is in no way incompatible with their art.

There is only one kind of writing that lives, and that is the simple, clear, strong, significant writing that also possesses wide and timeless appeal. This kind of writing is published more in the top general-interest magazines than in the literary magazines, though it may be found in both fields. Certainly a great deal of ephemeral stuff is published in the widely distributed smooth-paper magazines, but that is no reason for believing they never publish anything of greater value. On the contrary, the reverse is true.

Now let us turn our attention to seeing how the *literary* short short differs from the general circulation magazine short short:

1. *LENGTH*

There appears to be no arbitrary length divisions to which the literary short short must conform. The minimum number of words is about eight hundred, at times less; with the maximum number of words about twenty-five hundred. The majority are about twelve hundred words long. In most magazines, a story of twenty-five hundred words would be considered a short story, but in the literary field they have the form and content of a short short, and so are classified in that category. The length of a story does not matter so much in this field, as most of the magazines do not carry much, if any, advertising. Consequently, they are not seriously concerned whether a story can be put on one page, or perhaps require two, or possibly a run-over on to back pages.

2. *PRESENTATION*

The stories for this field are written with the premise that the reader has a college background, that he is also widely read, has traveled extensively or has read many books on travel, that he knows a good deal about art, history, music, philosophy, and has at least a smattering of one or more languages besides his own. *This is taken for granted,* not in all stories, but in a large percentage of them. For instance, allusions to famous pictures, to schools of painting, to historical events, characters in literature, mythological beings, and so on, are freely made with no explanation. This is not the case in stories appearing in the top general-interest magazines, whose editors take the stand that the reader may or may not understand the implications of such allusions.

The vocabulary used by most writers of literary short shorts is very extensive. They use many multi-syllabled words, and as many "writing" and "thinking" words, as distinguished from "speaking" or "conversational" words, as they desire, provided they use them properly, and effectively. For example, you may find such words as *gonfalon, threnody, contiguity, guerdon,* and *oriflamme,* in the literary short short. But you are not likely to find them in the general-interest magazine short short. Words, and even sentences, in languages other than English are often included in a story, with no explanation of their meaning, nor can their meaning be ascertained from the text of the story. The languages most often used are French, Latin, Spanish, and Russian.

Style and mood are of great importance in the literary short short. The writing *must be polished,* brilliant, and smooth; figures of speech original and apt, with a complete absence of trite words and clichés. It appears to matter more *how the story is presented,* than *what* the story is. Stories that have no discernible point, and no visible significance do, however, show the most exquisite style, smoothness and rhythm.

The cultural background demanded of the writer of literary short shorts is, as you see, considerable. Unless you have that background, whether acquired through formal, academic channels, or through your own effort, you will find it very difficult to break into this field. However, it is not impossible. Nothing is really impossible to an intelligent, determined person with talent, who is willing to pay the price in hard work and knowledge for the success he desires.

3. *EMOTIONAL VALUE AND SIGNIFICANCE*

Almost without exception, the literary short short is planned to appeal to the esthetic sense as well as to the intellect. At times literary stories are as devoid of emotional appeal as a flawless slab of stainless steel. When emotions are aroused in the reader, they are usually directed toward sociological ideas or world and race problems, rather than toward individuals. Even when an individual is used as the focal point in a story, he is likely to symbolize a type, or group, rather than appear as an alive, vibrant, highly individualized human being.

For example, one literary short short, obviously intended to arouse strong emotion in the reader, depicted a lynching in a small Southern town. The story did not deal *primarily* with the man who was lynched, or with the handful of individuals who formed the nucleus of the mob but *with the town, as an entity.*[4] Its title set the keynote for this. And it was emphasized from Beginning to End. An *intellectual* judgment was passed *on the town,* rather than an emotion felt toward a specific *human being.* This illustrates one of the fundamental differences between the literary short short and the short short written for the general-interest magazines, where *emotion toward one human being* is most often the core of the story. Most literary short shorts are deliberately aimed to build in the reader an intellectual appreciation of a situation, and not a true emotional effect.

[4] THE TOWN'S SHAME.—Source unknown.

4. *TABOOS*

Within the wide bounds of sophisticated good taste, there are no taboos here that the writer is required to observe. Insane persons, drug addicts, cheats, murderers, and so on, may be cast in major roles, and minor ones as well. The main character need not be admirable or even likable. Evil is often triumphant over good, and there is seldom any sympathy wasted on the defeated good. The result is accepted with no particular feeling, one way or the other, *as a phase of life.* Satire is welcome, provided it is superlatively written around a new idea or an old idea with a fresh approach. Stories with sordid, even gruesome, details are not uncommon. The *intelligentsia* do not react to these unpleasant facets of life as does the general reader. What remains is an enjoyment of the perfection and exquisiteness of the presentation.

5. *TIME LAPSES*

As is to be expected, the greatest latitude exists as to time lapses in these stories, though in most the time lapse is brief; a few minutes, a few hours, a day. Some, however, cover anywhere from a year to forty years.

6. *TIMELINESS*

This is another phase that has changed radically in the past few years. Not so long ago, stories were published dealing with any past time, some settings even being in prehistoric ages. Now, however, most of the stories are tales of today, their timeliness stressed and pointed out by reference to the newest developments in science and thought. It may be that the present is so violently dramatic, that no time in the past can hope to compete with it, and fantasy pales beside the spectacular realities of today.

7. *ROMANCE*

Romance, as we know it in the general-interest magazines, is rarely seen in the literary short short. If love does exist between a man and a woman, it is a bitter, twisted love that ends in disaster of some kind. This disaster may be anything from dull frustration and despair to murder. If these unhappy people do marry, their characters are such that the reader knows they will shortly hate each other and practice on each other the most sadistic cruelties. But of course we must always keep in mind the word limitations of the short short medium. And that such material is dramatic. If we are to judge by what they

like to read, we might well believe that intellectuals in general do not have faith in romantic or idealized love between men and women.

In the short short fiction appearing in literary magazines you will find as a rule the unusual, the original, the unexpected and always it will be beautifully presented. The unexpected is perhaps one of the chief charms of the literary field. You never know what kind of story you will find there and you can rarely forecast how any story will end. It may end as you think it will, but the odds are very much in favor of its ending in a way of which you would never have dreamed.

If you have the background, the originality, the desire to do so, by all means try the literary short short field. No matter what happens, you will enjoy the doing. If your story is accepted, you will receive a small to largish check, depending on the magazine that accepts your story. You will also receive the awed homage of a select number of clever, intellectual people. You may also receive an invitation from one of the mighty general-interest magazines—always on the watch for new talent—to submit a story. What happens after that is strictly up to you.

Method of Study

1. What are three important ways in which the literary short short differs from the short short in the general-interest magazine?
2. Write a summary of an original short short suitable for a literary magazine that is built around a belief, or a psychological attitude.
3. Write a summary of an original short short for a literary magazine using love between a man and a woman as the basis.
4. Write the summary of an original short short for a literary magazine having timeliness and social significance.

CHAPTER XVIII

Less Known Short Short Markets

UNLESS a writer has had either considerable experience, or guidance from someone who knows, he is likely to think the short short market is confined to the limited field of top smooth-paper magazines. He is unaware that the market for short shorts is far wider. That it includes a variety of magazines and, therefore, of types and requirements. Of course, the writer realizes the close connection between *slanting* and sales and hence that each market must be studied to know its requirements. For instance, it is a waste of time to send a short short suited to one particular newspaper syndicate to the editor of a health magazine. Nor is any good end achieved by sending a short short to an adventure magazine when it really belongs in one of the character-building publications for young people. After all, that is *common sense* isn't it?

"Know your markets" should be the first commandment in the Decalogue of the writer anyway. How? By the only way to *know* anything—*Study* it! And the only way to know a manuscript market is to study that too. Not in a sketchy, half-hearted manner. Suppose we turn our attention to the various fields in which short shorts are published. To be sure, each field contains many publications whose requirements often vary to some extent; nevertheless, the stories published have a sort of family resemblance:

1. *THE SYNDICATES*

Because all newspaper syndicates do not use short shorts, the writer's first task is either to secure a list of those who do, or to query

the various syndicates to find out. A word as to how the syndicates operate might be useful at this point.

A syndicate is not itself a newspaper, but sells material to newspapers. In other words, it is a wholesale distributor dealing in many kinds of newspaper material other than spot news. Some newspapers publish several pages of syndicated material every day and a large section of such material on Sunday. This same material appears simultaneously in many newspapers all over the United States. The large syndicates use both long and short fiction, and serials. Their length and content requirements are rigid and easily ascertained by trained analysis, varying to some extent with each syndicate.

Almost all syndicates using short shorts demand a length of between 900 and 1100 words. The stories must be about young people and they must feature romance. Fast tempo is desirable and a preponderance of dialogue with action. The characters in these stories do not just sit and talk. In fact, they rarely sit. They move around, *doing things that build a dramatic and emotional climax.* The presentation is simple and unadorned with any literary flourishes. A simple story is simply told in a minimum of simple words and sentences. All syndicate stories have completely happy endings of the type, "Then they were married and lived happily ever after." Once in a great while a marriage problem story is accepted here, but when this happens the two main characters are very young and the story, of course, ends happily. Characterization is at a minimum. Plot and action are emphasized, along with simple, easily understood emotions.

The rate of pay offered beginners by this type of syndicate is usually one-half cent a word, or five dollars for a story of one thousand words. But do not scorn this. The field is an excellent one for the beginner and for the semi-professional. It is not difficult to sell here, *once you know what is wanted and achieve the skill to produce it.* Do not for a moment deceive yourself by thinking that writing these stories does not require skill. Try to write one and you'll see. *By such practice you will get valuable experience in creating story ideas and in organizing and presenting them.* And you will be paid while doing it, provided your work is up to the standard required by the syndicate. Furthermore, this is a good market to repeat in, because after your name is known to the editor and he realizes you can consistently turn out the type of story he can sell, then you will prob-

ably sell him your long shorts, even serials. After a while he will give you a higher rate for your material, because you will have become one of his "regulars." There are many writers, both men and women, who specialize in the syndicate field, doing whatever their special talents fit them to do, and making a very good living at it.

However, there is one syndicate whose requirements differ materially from other syndicates and whose rate of pay is much higher. It gets out a Sunday Supplement called *This Week* that may be found in one newspaper in almost every large city of the United States. This market is the dream of most beginning writers and a dream that is possible of fulfillment, though it is much more difficult to make than other syndicates. Its rates vary but are high, and are based, apparently, on what the editor thinks the material is worth rather than on a hard and fast schedule of payment. Though top writers appear in it, this market is kindly to the unknown. But he has to be as good as the top writers and fulfill all the requirements of the publication. It is a waste of time and postage to send unpolished, amateurish short shorts to this market. *This Week* demands and gets the best.

This Week always publishes one short short and sometimes two or more in each issue, so you see that during the year they use perhaps seventy short shorts to a monthly magazine's twelve. This makes the chances of a sale here much greater, other things being equal.

The editor of *This Week* likes short shorts from a thousand to two thousand words in length. Young love, light, gay, modern and tied into current events is the writer's best bet, but other types are used. There are few limitations as to subject matter in this particular market. Stories about married people, old people, and children find a place here. Sometimes even character stories. The fundamental requirement is that the story has substance, that the characters are interesting and convincing, and that emotional values are well handled. The actual writing, while still kept simple, is much better than in other syndicates. The standard is almost, if not equal to, that of the top smooth-paper magazines. Therefore, a story that just misses the top magazines stands a good chance here, provided it has what this editor wants: human interest drama, emotion, simply and convincingly told.

2. NEWSPAPERS USING SHORT SHORTS IN THEIR OWN SUNDAY SUPPLEMENTS

There are not many of these, but they are markets well worth investigating. Their rates of pay differ, but all pay the writer one-half cent a word or over. Their requirements vary slightly, but a well-written thousand-word short short of young love is always welcome.

Incidentally, the way to make writing short shorts for the syndicates and independent newspapers pay is to build up a stock of at least twenty-five stories and *keep that many in the mail all the time.* As soon as one story sells replace it with another. Incidentally, an author who waits to sell one story before he writes another had better not depend at all on writing for his livelihood, because if he does he will surely starve to death. Also, it is better to specialize at first—and later, too, for that matter. No one can write well for a dozen varying markets at the same time. You will do better if you get into the rhythm of one general market and stay there until you have succeeded in that market. Then if you want to try another and more exacting market you are far better fitted to do so than you were before, and your chance of success in the higher field are vastly greater than they would otherwise be. Never forget that a goal can be reached more quickly if *first steps* are taken slowly and with deliberation.

3. RURAL AND REGIONAL MAGAZINES

There are many magazines published regularly in the United States of which many writers have never heard. Yet most of them pay fair to good rates for short shorts and offer opportunities to the beginner and the semi-professional writer. Some circulate in a limited area composed of a few states in the south, or the east, or the middle-west, or the west, and the southwest. Many of these general areas have several magazines of slightly different types. Yet all require at least fairly good writing, and some even demand a literary standard as high as some of the top general-interest magazines.

Here, again, the individual magazine must be studied if more than a pious hope of success is entertained. Most of the distinctly rural magazines are aimed to interest the whole family and short shorts slanted for them must be planned accordingly. On the other hand, in some the fiction is planned to interest the women of the family al-

most exclusively, while the articles are those that would more especially interest men. Generally speaking, these magazines will use marriage problem stories, stories of older women and stories of children, but all take a really good story of young love.

Most of the short shorts in these magazines have a rural or small town setting, preferably in the region where the magazine circulates, though this is not a hard and fast rule. The stories are simple, about people who are familiar to their readers, and movingly told. Sophistication is definitely out in this field. If you are especially familiar with some part of the United States, you should acquaint yourself with the *regional magazines* of that general area and those that publish short shorts. Because of your first-hand knowledge of the people and conditions and industries of that part of the country, you should be able to write short shorts that will be acceptable to the editors of these specific magazines.

By the way, one sure way to find the names and addresses of these magazines is to write to the Chamber of Commerce in the capital of each state in your chosen area and ask for the names of magazines published in that state. Be sure to enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. When you have the information requested, write a letter to each magazine editor telling him of your intention to submit fiction and that you will be grateful if he will send you several back numbers of his publication so that you may see the type of material he wants. Also, you will show a proper cooperative spirit if you enclose twenty-five or fifty cents to pay for these magazines and thereby assure your receiving them. Too, you might ask in your letter *what story lengths are preferred.* With these magazines before you, you are in a position to know what and how to write for this editor. In other words, you will be *slanting* your stories. Thereby most of the guesswork is removed. This saves you money in stationery, stamps and time.

4. *CHARACTER-BUILDING AND SEMI-RELIGIOUS PUBLICATIONS*

Here is an enormous field that probably uses far more short shorts every month than all other short short fields put together. The demand for short shorts is great, the competition not keen. As is to be expected in such an overwhelmingly large group of magazines, comparative literary merit and rates of payment have wide limits of var-

iation. Magazines may be found paying from nothing at all up to five cents a word. The presentation varies from extreme amateurishness to the finished work of full-time professional writers.

Here, *the age-group* for which these magazines are published likewise has to be taken into consideration. A reader of every age from pre-school to adulthood can find literary fare for his enjoyment in this wide field. Most of these publications appear every week, and many contain from one to four short shorts in each issue.

These character-building publications are the Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls official magazines, and others of a similar nature. In addition, *every religious body that has a national organization publishes a full range of such magazines.* Also, there are non-sectarian publishing houses that get out magazines for all the recognized age-groups. Samples of these may be secured from most churches using them, often without charge.

Although the short shorts in these publications are, of course, aimed at character building, the obvious moral, the "preachy" style, is taboo. Observe that in short shorts for children's and young people's publications characters are used that correspond in age to the age-group for which the publication is slanted. Adults, if used at all, are in distinctly minor roles. The problems of the heroes of these short shorts are *the problems of young people today and they solve them themselves,* not with the help of older people.

Incidentally, there are some very fine publications for adults in this general group, too: Publications in which the names of top writers often appear. This wide and varied group offers opportunities for every writer, from the intelligent beginner to the full-time professional. It is well worth your while to get acquainted with the particular branch in this field that attracts you most and at the same time offers you the quickest opportunity to get your work accepted.

5. *TRADE, BUSINESS, PROFESSIONAL AND SPORT MAGAZINES AND HOUSE ORGANS*

These are numerous indeed. Most of them use at least one short short in each issue. The rate of payment is usually not high. Yet they offer a wide-open field for the beginning writer, where he may win his first checks, his first taste of success. For the young writer a check for anything at all is worth hundreds of dollars in encouragement and build-up of the writer's self-confidence.

Usually these short shorts have some connection, however slight, with the specific nature or purpose of the magazine. For example, a sport magazine will like a story about fishing, or with a fisherman appearing in it. A drugstore magazine likes a story having some connection with a drugstore—if it is no more than having the boy and girl meet in the place. These stories require, on the part of the author, special ingenuity in choosing ideas to write, as well as special knowledge of "backgrounds." To that end, there is much less competition in this field. If you can write one of these specialized stories even fairly well you are almost certain to sell it. But, as in all similar cases, *study your specific market* before you plan your story.

6. *MEN'S ADVENTURE MAGAZINES*

These are pulp-paper magazines such as *Argosy* and *Blue Book*. They have only recently begun to use short shorts, but the trend is rapidly growing. Around fifteen hundred words is a favored length, though slightly shorter and slightly longer stories are acceptable. These stories are filled with tight, tense action in which danger plays an important role. Will the hero be able to stop the train before it reaches the weakened trestle? Will the bad man succeed in stealing the old prospector's bag of gold nuggets? Such are the problems involved. The various magazines differ in their requirements, of course, but the better magazines in this field demand skilled writing, sound characterization, motivation, drama and emotion. Some of these short shorts might have appeared in the top general-interest magazines, or just missed making them by a narrow margin. This is not an easy field to break into, because the stories must have a good plot, plenty of action, and a fast tempo. On the other hand, you may have a special flair for this type of writing. If so, you may sell your first story here. The rate of pay isn't dazzling, but it is adequate to the effort involved and the time required to write an action short short.

7. *MAGAZINES OF MEN'S FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS*

These publications are usually very well turned out on high quality smooth paper. They carry a good class of advertising because they go to a group of people who are at least moderately well-to-do and have money to spend on the comforts and even luxuries of life. And they go into the home. Most of these magazines carry at least one short short in each issue and most of them print twelve issues a year. A few pay excellent rates because the magazines are heavily subsidized, and

their demands are correspondingly high. The stories are of special interest to substantial business and professional men and usually have a background of business or sport. Romance is not taboo, but it is not given a sentimental treatment. The romance must ring true and not be over-emphasized. Frequently the short shorts very closely resemble the type published in the better action magazines. *Elks Magazine* and *Rotarian* are outstanding examples in this field.

8. *LOVE PULP MAGAZINES*

As the name indicates, these magazines are printed on pulp paper, deal exclusively in romance, and appeal only to women. The stories are almost without exception told from the viewpoint of the girl, or from the omniscient viewpoint. They use the "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl," formula, or its reverse in which the girl meets boy, and so on. These stories always end happily. Flashbacks are seldom used and the stories are either the "Cinderella" type, or they follow one of the PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT plot patterns. This market is not favorable to stories of PURPOSE ABANDONMENT, BITER-BIT or DECISION. They appear to entail a too complicated thought-pattern for devotees of these love pulp magazines.

The heroine in these stories doesn't smoke or drink. She is pure and lovely and helpless and feminine. She is the epitome of what a man dreams he wants in a woman—but is not attracted to in real life.

In such markets rates vary, but are usually about a cent a word. If you have the knack of writing these stories you can make money at it, because they do not have the exacting requirements of the smooth-paper markets. Once you have the simple outline on paper, or clear in your mind, the story can be written quickly and does not require much polishing in the way of presentation.

9. *THE "LITTLE" MAGAZINES*

These are actually little magazines, their circulation very limited, and carrying no advertisements. Usually with no financial backing, they are carried on by a handful of starry-eyed enthusiasts (bless their souls) who have dedicated their time, talent and very lives to the advancement of what they call "literature."

These "little" magazines definitely have their place for they have tended and brought to flower the embryonic genius of more than one great writer, including Saroyan and Eric Knight. These magazines

give the talented young author a chance to see his work in print, a chance to show what he can do to the mighty editors of the great national circulation magazines—and in that we can be thankful.

Names as such mean nothing to the little literary magazines. But what that young writer *can do* means everything—and again we can be thankful. The "little" magazines do not insist on form; in fact, they are a little suspicious of it. They look mainly for power and beauty of writing, a comprehension and philosophy of life, even if the life presented is only a passing moment in the life of a plumber or a tramp. They demand an *awareness of life that is at the root of all great art.* In that they are doing a most important work and for which I, personally, thank them.

Editors of the "big" magazines watch these "little" magazines for new and promising writers. If your story in one of the "little" magazines is really living and worth while, you in all probability will be invited to submit something to one of the top magazines. Many of today's most famous writers got their start *via* the "little" magazines.

Often the life of the "little" magazines is a brief one—and few of them actually pay their contributors; that is, in money. But all of them pay in personal satisfaction and prestige and a possible chance at one of the really big magazines.

This chapter is, of course, not a complete survey of the markets of the short short field. It is not possible to make such a survey. But we have surveyed the most important groups of the less known magazines that use short shorts. You can enlarge on this with research and study of your own. For example, if you live in a large city, you may discover one, or several, neighborhood magazines or newspapers that use short shorts with local color.

Remember that the short short market is a growing field. As the tempo of life becomes even swifter, as we have less and less time for reading, so we demand shorter units of entertainment. Stories that we can read in five or, at the most, ten minutes. The writer who specializes now in learning how to write short shorts will enjoy for many years an increasing demand for his work.

To that end an analysis of the requirements of these less known markets is by way of a foundation stone.

Method of Study

1. Survey as many magazines as you can find that fit into this field and analyze them for:
   (1) Type of short short preferred.
   (2) Wherein they differ from each other.
2. Discover for yourself new magazines among the less known that take short shorts.

Part V

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT SHORT

CHAPTER XIX

How To Read Short Shorts for Technique

THE professional writer does not read as other people read. Any more than the artist looks at a picture in the same way that people who are not artistic look at it. A professional writer is a technician in so far as the art of writing is concerned, and so when he reads the work of other writers he is much more keenly and appreciatively aware of its beauties, as well as its faults, than the ordinary reader who sees only the effect and not the means by which that effect is achieved.

The trained writer is also the trained reader, or rather, he is if he takes the trouble to train himself. The ability to read *as a writer* is important to the professional writer. He is able to see what others in his field are doing—writers who write better than he can, as well as writers who do not write as well as he can. And he learns from both. The writer-reader no longer *guesses* how certain effects are achieved—he *knows*. He can then apply this basic knowledge that comes from his reading to his own story material, give it original form through his own personality, his own imagination, and so appeal to his reader's own imagination, his reader's experiences and memories. A point well to emphasize, one I always stress to my students is "It isn't what you do to the reader; *it's what you cause him to do to himself.*"

Let it never be forgotten that stories that have strong reader appeal emotionally are stories that sell.

Learning to read as a writer isn't easy at first, because habits of reading *as a reader* are deeply ingrained in all of us. Most certainly it is not desirable that the reader-habit be broken, because the writer

must always be able to *put himself in the place of the reader.* But it is desirable that, co-existent with the reader habit of reading, the professional writer *develop the writer habit of reading.* How can this be learned? In the beginning you will find yourself reading entirely as a reader for the story alone; that is, for the emotional appeal. But, paragraph by paragraph, *you will re-read for how the story is written* —the mechanics of the story. Then you are reading for technique and that is when you are reading as a writer. You will find yourself reading for two separate purposes for a while, but don't let that worry you.

There is no skill in which a high degree of efficiency can be attained at once. There is always a period of conscious striving and, consequently, of awkwardness and partial failure. Not until the subconscious mind at least partly directs our efforts do we achieve the ease and deftness of accomplishment. So keep trying, keep practicing, until one day you will suddenly discover that reader habit and writer habit of reading have become one integrated habit, or faculty of discernment. And instead of your reading enjoyment being lessened, it will be doubled because you will be enjoying the story and *know why you are enjoying it.*

Learning how to read for technique does not come about by wishful thinking. It comes about by directed, planned discipline. It does very little good to say, "Now I shall read this story as writer, for its technique," when you don't know what to look for or how to determine what is important and what is unimportant. Because this book has to do solely with the short short, although much of what is discussed is applicable to all kinds of writing, in this chapter let us find out (a) what the most important technical points are in a short short, (b) how to look for them and (c) how to evaluate them; in other words, *how to read as a writer.*

Yet first let us look at and try to understand the mental state of the reader who reads only for entertainment; or more correctly speaking, for the emotional effect. And the mental state of the writer who reads, not only for the emotional effect, but for technique.

The ordinary reader, no matter what his mental I.Q. may be, sees and feels only the effect or effects *that the writer desires him to feel.* He is not interested in *how* those effects have been achieved. In fact, so that the reader may get the greatest possible pleasure from his

reading, the mechanics, the devices by which these effects have been achieved, should never be visible to him. *The trained writer camouflages these literary devices by every means in his power,* and rightly so. This is a "must" of every art. Fortunately this is not especially difficult to do, since the reader isn't looking for literary devices and, in all probability, wouldn't recognize them if he did happen to find them. But that doesn't mean the reader is not extremely sensitive to their effects, because he is. His training as a reader has developed this sensitivity, and along with it a blindness to how these effects are achieved. Incidentally this is often a very lucky thing for the writer, as you and I know too well.

But the writer cannot afford to read for reader pleasure alone. He cannot afford to abandon himself entirely when reading to the play of emotion and to the sensory experiences the writer offers him. He must not only be aware of effects, but also aware of the *causes* of those effects. This is so that he will learn quickly how to achieve desired effects, and then *continue to increase his skill by observing methods used by other writers.*

When you first start this discipline of reading for technique, you may feel that you are losing your pleasure in reading *as a reader,* while you are increasing your pleasure in reading *as a writer.* This is only temporary. As soon as you have merged these two ways of reading *into one way of reading*—and this will come about very soon—your reading pleasure will be immeasurably enhanced. You will be aware of so much more in what you read than ever before, that reading in the ordinary way will never again satisfy you.

Every chapter in this book has built towards your learning to read for technique, but before we examine the final steps to be taken in this important activity, let us see how you can secure one of the most valuable reference books any writer can have. This reference book is *a file of published stories you have selected for yourself,* each one outstanding for at least one fine quality, one technical device you would like to emulate. You can't buy this book. *You have to compile it yourself.* Such a book compiled by someone else would be of little value to you. It must be made up of stories that *you* admire, that *you* think are extraordinarily worth while, stories to which *you* respond.

When you have a hundred or so short shorts, analyzed and indexed *for quick reference,* you will have numerous excellent examples of

how skilled writers solved a great many problems *peculiar* to the short short writer. Then, if you have trouble getting a short started, you can get out your file, see how the skilled writer introduced his characters, got his action moving, etc., briefly and in an interesting way. In your compiled reference book you will find at least one story that will give you an idea for a lead or will so fire your own imagination that you will get going. Your story Beginning will not be like the Beginning of the published story. It can't be, because *your story* is different, your characters are different, your setting is different. But you *will have been helped by the basic technique* of the published story Beginning. You will have used that basic technique as a springboard for your own imagination, your own originality. *This is the value of your reference book. It will be a constantly growing file of published stories carefully selected and carefully analyzed for technique.*

It is a good idea to number these stories and index them by titles. Of course, if you are sufficiently ambitious and have the time, you can cross-index them for various qualities and literary devices, but most writers find the index by titles sufficient.

Clip neatly the short short you propose to add to your file. A razor blade is a handy tool for cutting from the magazine. Don't tear out the pages. Not only does tearing them out give a messy appearance to your reference book, but you may tear off part of the story.

Then slip a piece of paper into your typewriter and write the headings given on the sample page following. If you have not already done so, analyze the story now according to these headings, and fill in your conclusions under each heading.

Number the page properly. Put this piece of paper on top of your story and staple all the pages together at the top. Now the story is ready to take its place in your story file.

HOW TO ANALYZE A SHORT SHORT

Now let us see how to go about analyzing a short short, taking as our guideposts these various headings. Naturally, these are only the most important ones. There are many others and you are, of course, free to add as many as you like. But the headings given here will cover the ground sufficiently for all practical purposes. If an analysis is too complicated it becomes confusing and defeats its own ends.

Sample Analysis Page

Story Number.....
STORY TITLE ....Name of magazine.....Date published.....
TITLE....(good, medium, poor) .....
LENGTH....(count words, don't estimate).....
PLOT PATTERN OR TYPE.....
UNITY OF EFFECT....(good, medium, poor).....
CHARACTERIZATION....(good, medium, poor).....
DIALOGUE.....(natural, poor).....
SETTING....(good, medium, poor).....LOCALE.....
OPENING PARAGRAPH....(good, medium, poor).....
" " TYPE....(dialogue, description, action, character) .....
CLOSING PARAGRAPH OR PAY-OFF LINE....(good, medium, poor) .....
EMOTIONAL EFFECT....(name specifically).....
(strong, medium, weak) .....
TIME LAPSE....(how long).....
FORMAT....(chronological or flashback).....
VIEWPOINT USED .....
NUMBER OF CHARACTERS.....
PROBLEM OR BASIC IDEA.....
GRAPH OF INTEREST.....(see Page 208).....

This method of breaking down short shorts and recording the breakdown for easy reference has proved to be of value to many a writer.

1. *TITLE*

Of course you know the qualities a good short short title must have, but let us review them swiftly: The title should be short, in most cases, and an incomplete idea. It should arouse curiosity in the reader, a desire to know what the story is about. And it should never, *never* give away the End of the story. It should have to do with the gist, the heart of the story. A short short title is especially desirable if it has a *double meaning,* and if it can be used in the story as a *unifying force.* Incidentally, alliteration is effective if not overdone.

2. *LENGTH*

Count the words in a short short, don't estimate them. Unless you count the words, you can easily be off two hundred words or more either way in a seventeen hundred word story. It is better to *know how many words* a writer has used to create a certain effect, tell a certain story, than to guess, and very probably guess wrong. The exact count gives you an accurate yardstick by which to measure the length of your own story.

3. *PLOT PATTERN OR TYPE*

While you are reading, watch carefully to see if the short short is a pattern story, either of the PURPOSE or DECISION type and, if a PURPOSE story, *what kind* of PURPOSE story. If it isn't a pattern story, analyze it for OFF-PATTERN type. Ask yourself, is it a build-up of emotion in the reader toward Actor A? Toward the situation? Toward the story as a whole, as might be the case in a light story designed only to amuse? Or is it a Cinderella story? Or one designed almost exclusively to surprise the reader at the End? Give plenty of time and thought to this classification.

4. *UNITY OF EFFECT*

This isn't easy. *Unity is secured in many ways:* by one central line of interest, by unity of time and place, by spotlighting one character, by the repetition of key phrases and words, by effective planting and reaping, by the use of an object in the Beginning and again in the End, and so on indefinitely. The means of achieving unity are numberless but the effect is the same; a tight integration and close weaving of the story material into a clear pattern. Look carefully and find the *specific devices* that give the story unity.

5. *CHARACTERIZATION*

As you know, *characterization in the short short must be accomplished while the story moves forward.* Evaluate the characterization in the short short you are reading. Ask yourself if the characters really come alive, as individual people, or are they merely types? If they are convincing as people, exactly how did the writer accomplish the feat? What words and word combinations did he use? Take note, not only of words, but of word combinations. *Kid, child, brat* may each be used to designate a young person of either sex, but they have very different connotations. And it is these connotations that swiftly

characterize the one to whom they are applied. When analyzing a short short for characterization, don't be content to think, "That's good characterization," or "That's bad characterization." *Why* is it good? *Why* is it bad? *The more exact you are in your thinking,* the more *valuable* your analysis will be *to you.* And you are doing this for yourself. No one else!

6. *NUMBER OF CHARACTERS*

A record of the number of characters used in each short short you analyze, and add to your reference book or file, will cure you of any tendency to crowd too many characters into the short shorts you write.

7. *SETTING*

Note how quickly the setting is established, the scene set. This will be done with two or three specific details—usually no more in a short short. These details will not stick up like sore thumbs, either. They will be *part of the story.* If they are not part of the story then you will be forced to rate the setting of this short short as "poor."

8. *OPENING PARAGRAPH*

We have stressed in this book the importance of the opening paragraph of the short short. Really good opening paragraphs are not easy to write, because so much must be told, *so much accomplished* in them. Therefore, a really effective opening paragraph deserves your most careful study. Exactly *how* did the writer arouse reader curiosity? Reader emotion? Introduce his characters? Give the setting? Make the story situation clear? *Don't be satisfied by thinking in generalities.* There is nothing that spells disaster sooner than a willingness on your part to accept fuzzy thinking. Be sure you *know exactly* how the author accomplished these ends so effectively. When you really *know how he did it* you are much nearer knowing how to do it yourself.

9. *CLOSING PARAGRAPH OR PAY-OFF LINE*

The last paragraph and last line of a short short are tremendously important. No really good short short peters out in an anti-climax. Instead, it rises in intensity of drama and emotion *to the last line.* Often this reveals the surprise toward which the story has been building. Sometimes it sums up the story and thus gives the reader a sharp emotional impact. The last line of a short short must be strong, ef-

fective and significant. This is true even of the lightest story. So analyze last paragraphs and last lines carefully to see *just how to bring* your story to an effective end.

10. *EMOTIONAL EFFECT*

Determine the emotional effect of the story *as a whole.* State this emotional effect in the fewest possible words, *one word* if you can. One of the values of writing down an analysis of a story is that *writing your thoughts forces you* to sharpen and crystallize them, to some extent at least. It always cuts down fuzzy thinking. And as has been stated previously, fuzzy thinking is something no short short writer can afford. He must think with crystal clarity, because that is the way he must write. Analyzing short shorts is one of the finest exercises in the world to train a writer *to think clearly.*

11. *TIME LAPSE*

This is easily ascertained, but is important. If you write down the time lapse of every short short you analyze, you will be painlessly cured of the habit to which most beginning writers are addicted—that of giving short shorts time lapses of even years. Of course a very few short shorts do have long time lapses, but they are decidedly the exception. When you do find a short short having a long time lapse, study it carefully for the *devices used to preserve* interest and unity.

12. *FORMAT*

Most short shorts, as you know, are written chronologically. But a few—almost invariably with long time lapses—are given the flashback format, for reasons we have studied in Chapter X. Give full attention to the *transitions* in stories having the flashback format, and try to understand the reason the writer chose to tell his story that way. This study will help you to recognize and effectively to use flashback material in the short short form.

13. *VIEWPOINT USED*

A large number of the stories you analyze will probably be told from the omniscient viewpoint, but you will recognize other viewpoints as well. Learn to differentiate between the different viewpoints surely and quickly. Analysis of the way viewpoints are used will help you in more ways than you realize.

14. *PROBLEM OR BASIC IDEA*

In previous chapters we have often broken short shorts down into

their basic components. Now you should be able to do it for yourself; at least, after a little practice. I can think of no other single phase of short short analysis that is as important as this. When you reduce a short short *to its basic idea* you discover what the story is about. In addition, *learn to state it in a form that cannot be further simplified.* All the frills, all the decorations, have been stripped away. You are down to the story's heart. This heart is so simple, so fundamental, so much a part of life itself, that it is capable of infinite variations. Numberless stories may be, and more than likely have been, written around it. If the story is significant and moving, the basic idea is sound and may be trusted. You may safely use it as the nucleus of an original story of *your own,* built around characters *you know,* living in a setting *familiar to you.*

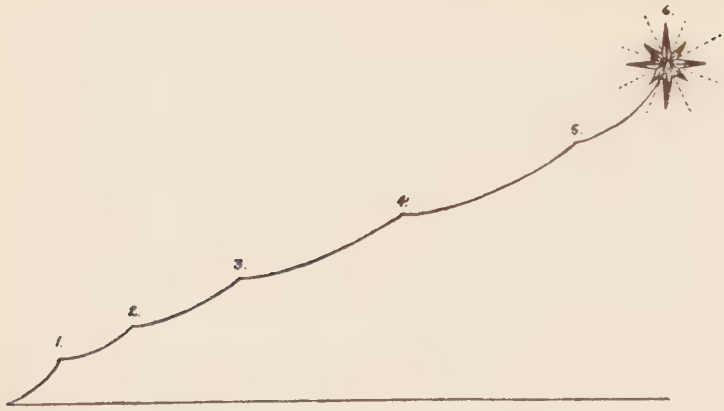
Note: The above paragraph is of such tremendous importance to you that I want you to *study* it until you fully comprehend its significance.

Every short short that you break down to its basic idea is a potential source of not one, but of many original short shorts. I repeat I cannot urge you too strongly to break down every short short you read to its basic idea, write that basic idea down, and file it, not haphazardly, but according to a system. It makes no difference whether or not that short short is worthy of a place in your short short file, and it makes no difference whether or not you even like the story. If the basic idea around which that story is written appeals to you as worth while and fundamentally sound, then that basic idea is worth keeping. Agreed?

15. *GRAPH OF INTEREST*

One value of drawing a graph of interest for every short short you file is that *before you can draw such a graph* you must have analyzed the story sufficiently well to know where the peaks and valleys of interest lie. Another reason for drawing such a graph is that it enables you to translate into terms of sight something that, though real, is intangible and has never been seen. This helps many writers to understand more clearly *the way interest is built to a climax,* not in a straight line, but in curves rising in a succession of peaks and finally to the greatest peak at the story's End. These curves and peaks form patterns that are more easily approximated by the individual writer in his own story when he can *see* them represented in a graph.

A typical short short interest graph follows:



1. Title
2. Opening paragraph
3. Development of action to a crisis
4. " " " " " succeeding crisis
5. " " " " " " "
6. Final climax and pay-off line

There are many other points of technique that you will watch for and learn to recognize other than those you set down on paper attached to each short story you file. Two of them follow:

1. *Plot steps*

Not all short shorts have, or need, plot steps. Others would be weak and ineffective without one or more. Watch for plot steps. Mark them in the story. Think about each one. Try to determine why the writer put that particular plot step where he did and why he wrote it as he did. Remember that *a plot step is used to give the reader important information and to point out and emphasize the significance of what has taken place in the scene.*

2. *Beginning, Body and End*

Observe where these divisions come in every short short you read, and just how each performs its functions. When a Beginning is very long, be sure you see why its excessive length was *necessary*, and *how*

it was made interesting. Note the way in which setting, characters, and story situation are presented in Beginnings that are very short. Be especially observant of dialogue. Train yourself to be keenly sensitive to the *way in which emotion is aroused* in the reader toward each character.

It may seem that I am asking you to watch a great many things at once in your study and analysis of short shorts, but it is not really so. Probably at first you will have to direct your mind consciously from one to the other, but this is a phase of training that quickly passes. Soon you will be able to read quickly and easily, missing none of the points that are of interest to you as a technician, just as when you are driving a car along a busy street you see everything that is of interest to you *as a driver* without consciously looking for it.

In this work of analyzing short shorts and building up your reference file of the best short shorts you find, you will be on your own. You have been given full instructions, but the *actual doing* is up to you. If you slight it, do it half-heartedly, you will defeat only yourself. If you follow through eagerly, enthusiastically and with careful attention to every detail, you will have satisfaction. You will experience the keenest pleasure in your expanding appreciation of what you read, in the increased flexibility of your mental powers.

Better still, you will be preparing yourself to write better short shorts. For really ambitious writers, these combined advantages of the sustained practice of analyzing short shorts is worth all the time and effort the undertaking demands.

Method of Study

1. Start your reference file of short shorts by carefully selecting ten outstanding short shorts and analyzing them by the method outlined in the preceding chapter.
2. Write an opening for a short short, using one hundred words or less to introduce your characters, give setting and story situation.
3. Write an effective pay-off line for the story you have begun.

CHAPTER XX

One Hundred and Ten Basic Ideas for Short Shorts

EACH of the basic ideas that follows may be developed into dozens, perhaps even hundreds, of short shorts—each one original. The potential value of such a collection of basic ideas to the student-writer, the semi-professional, and the professional writer is incalculable, *provided such a collection is used correctly.* The intrinsic worth of each basic idea has been proved, since it was the basis of at least one short short, and often of many short shorts published in top smooth-paper magazines. This collection is the result of careful reading, study and analysis to determine the ultimate basic idea of many hundreds of short shorts. Only the strongest, most effective and most popular basic ideas have been included herein.

Each basic idea has been carefully arranged and presented with the thought in mind *of making it a provocative springboard for the imagination and emotion of the writer,* not as a formula to be slavishly followed. Specific details of the story or stories written around each basic idea, details that might hamper instead of stimulate the imagination of the writer, have been left out. On the other hand, care has been exercised not to reduce the basic idea to a lifeless formula so general in its implications as to carry with it no emotional value.

Never forget that *the writer must be aroused emotionally by an idea before he can develop that idea into a salable story,* because all art is born in emotion.

No claim is made that this collection of basic short short ideas is

complete. In fact, it hardly scratches the surface of the great number of possible basic ideas for short shorts. The earnest, ambitious, professionally-minded writer will complement this list with a list of his own. A list that will never cease growing so long as he continues to write short shorts. The greatest good the writer can get from this collection of basic short short ideas is the determination never to read a story without reducing it to its basic idea and then to make a permanent record of it for possible later development along original lines.

The way to use a basic idea as a means to original, creative thinking along the lines of fiction is as follows: *Contemplate the idea for a brief time,* letting it sink into the subconscious mind. Then search in your memory for a similar, a related, or an opposite character, or character trait, or situation, or setting that you have known sometime in your past. You will enjoy doing this. One of the most intense delights and commonest activities of the human mind is the seeking out of resemblances and the noting of differences in both the concrete world and the world of ideas. In its simplest possible form, this activity was the first that mind, or intellect exercised. It is only through this faculty of noting resemblances and differences that conscious, individual life is possible. So use this faculty of yours to the utmost and train it to a high degree of excellence so that it *may work for you,* help you to achieve writing success.

By *relating the basic idea to a memory,* you have taken the first step toward creating an original story, because no one in the world except you ever has had *exactly the identical experience* that you remember. Now let your imagination, vivified with emotion, build on the combination you have made of the basic idea and your similar or dissimilar memory. Result? You cannot keep from creating an original story, because no one else will have the same material to work with as you have; the same temperament, the same character, the same philosophy of life. The story you create may not be a good story. That depends on your skill—natural or acquired—in manipulating and combining story ideas, and on the presentation of those ideas. But it will be an original story.

Some of the categories of basic ideas that follow contain only a few basic ideas, others contain many. The number of basic ideas in each category *is no indication of the relative number of published stories*

falling in that category. One basic idea may be the foundation for countless published stories in an infinite variety, while another basic idea may be the foundation for a much smaller number of published stories.

Throughout, with only two or three exceptions, I have used masculine pronouns in referring to all story characters. Need I mention that it does not follow that these characters are necessarily masculine? A whole story development may be made entirely different by *changing the sex* of Actor A, or any other character from masculine to feminine, or *vice versa.* Another complete story change may be made by *varying the age* of the story characters yet leaving the basic idea untouched. For example, take the one problem of overcoming fear. Just as a beginning, eight completely different stories may be created from that one idea by showing the following characters overcoming fear: A boy, a girl, a young man, a young woman, a middle-aged man, a middle-aged woman, an old man, an old woman. The problem of each will be different, different because of his sex and his age. And *the way he solves his problem* will be different for the same reason.

If you *vary the temperament* of the main character, *vary the specific fear,* and *vary the setting and obstacles,* you can begin to glimpse the really limitless number of ways in which one basic idea for a short short may be developed. And, be it noted, developed interestingly and successfully, after the technique of writing has been learned and skill in the use of that technique attained by directed work and practice.

Some of these categories overlap, just as story patterns overlap, or story plans overlap. But that need not trouble or confuse you. The yardstick used in separating these basic ideas into categories is, "What is the *outstanding characteristic* of this basic idea?" If *theme* appeared to be its outstanding characteristic it was classified as a *theme idea,* though at the same time it might have possibilities for a strong build-up of emotion in the reader toward the main character, or toward the story as a whole. At the same time, it might be a pattern story, and also present an intrinsically interesting situation.

Few stories, even short shorts, use only *one means* of interesting and moving the reader. Some short shorts use only a few means to this end, others use a great many. But there is always one means,

more important, more significant than any of the others, and it is this means that determines its classification.

Whatever else you may do in developing one or many of these basic ideas into original stories of your own, never forget that your first step is the creation in your own mind of interesting, believable characters[1] to *act out* your story. Without interesting, believable characters all your work and skill will avail you nothing. So be sure you take that first step *FIRST*.

Now let us turn our attention to the basic short short ideas themselves:

I. THE SURPRISE ENDING

As you know, many short shorts have a Surprise Ending, and any type *may* have a Surprise Ending. It is not uncommon to find a published short short that appears to have been designed for one purpose, that purpose being to give the reader a pleasing emotion of surprise in the last paragraph, or better still, the last line. In most cases, *the writer of a story of this type thinks of the Surprise Ending first, then builds his story to display that Surprise Ending to the best advantage.* The characters are usually likable and conflict is secured in countless ways.

BASIC IDEAS FOR THE SURPRISE ENDING

1. The story that is built to the revelation in the pay-off line of the real relationship of Actor A and the secondary character, the reader having been led to imagine that *their relationship was not what he supposed.*

2. The story that is built to a pay-off line or closing paragraph *that reveals the purpose of Actor A,* which the reader has thought to be evil, *is really admirable.* Also making clear the means used by Actor A to accomplish his purpose.

3. The story wherein the main character is, he says, looking for a relative or friend who is insane, or a malefactor of some kind, and who has caused him a great deal of trouble and suffering. *The Ending reveals that the main character is actually the dangerous lunatic himself,* or malefactor, and it is his relative or friend who has been caused

[1] See Chapter II, CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY, by Maren Elwood.

suffering and who is looking for him. *The surprise comes in the reversal idea.*

4. The story wherein Actor A is *tempted to do something intrinsically wrong, in order to help a loved one.* At the last moment he refuses to commit the wrong act. The surprise comes when it is revealed that had he committed the act he contemplated, great harm would have come to the one he loved because of his action.

5. The story wherein Actor A *appears to be a person who intends great harm to one or more actors in the story.* Instead, he is kind, considerate, helpful, much to everyone's astonishment. *The real surprise is the revelation of Actor A's identity.* He is not the person the characters in the story and the reader supposed him to be; he is a friend and not a foe.

6. The story wherein *Actor A has taken great care to keep painful knowledge from the secondary character.* The surprise is the revelation that the secondary character has been aware of the truth for a long time, but, from unselfish motives, has kept the fact from Actor A. That each knows the painful truth and knows that the other knows it, knits them even more closely together.

7. The story wherein Actor A, who faces a troubled situation, falls into casual conversation with a stranger, who seems just an ordinary person, perhaps even needing Actor A's help or sympathy. The stranger helps Actor A, by advice, suggestions or acts, or all three, to solve his problem. *The surprise is the revelation of the identity of the stranger, who is really a very important personage.*

8. Wherein Actor A proposes to the girl he loves. He tries to persuade her to marry him at once by telling her all the things he will do for her, give her; she won't have a worry, a responsibility in the world. She holds back, troubled and uncertain. She finally gets him to admit that he might need her. She immediately and joyfully consents to marry him. *All she was waiting for was the assurance that she was needed.*

9. Wherein Actor A is shown in a dramatic emotional situation that the reader thinks he understands. The Surprise Ending *shows the reader that the situation and action has a completely different significance from what he thought.*

Note: The real situation must always be more dramatic, or emotional, or more important than the one the reader accepts. Otherwise,

the story ends with an anti-climax that leaves the reader feeling let down and resentful.

10. Wherein Actor A sets out to win the regard or affection of one of the opposite sex, for the purpose of acquiring money or objects of value, or an offer of marriage. He has succeeded in securing one or more of his objectives when he discovers that the secondary character is actually without either money or prospects. *The surprise is furnished by the revelation that Actor A is not a bad person, after all,* has really fallen in love with the secondary character, and intends to marry her in spite of the fact that poverty and struggle will follow such action.

11. Wherein Actor A is shown as making every effort to secure the chance to engage in unpleasant and dangerous activity. The undertaking is successfully concluded. *The surprise is the revelation of Actor A's motive*—that of helping to protect from danger, or otherwise materially aiding someone he loves.

12. Wherein Actor A, in love and about to marry a character unknown to the secondary character, *thinks the secondary character is in love with him and expects to marry him.* Surprise is secured by the revelation that the secondary character is in love with someone else, and delighted to hear of Actor A's contemplated marriage, since that releases the secondary character from the responsibility of looking after Actor A. This makes it possible for the secondary character to make a desirable marriage.

13. Wherein Actor A's life and training and previous occupation have given him special knowledge along one special line. He seems to boast about his special knowledge. The secondary character dislikes him, thinks he is lying, or at least exaggerating the extent of his knowledge. *The surprise is the revelation of the way his special knowledge enabled him to achieve success,* not only for himself, but for those associated with him.

14. Wherein Actor A tries to make it appear that someone other than himself loves the secondary character, in order to make the secondary character happy. In his efforts to do this, he reveals to the secondary character that he himself loves this secondary character. Since the secondary character loves him, the story ends happily. *The surprise is the revelation of the specific act that revealed Actor A's love to the secondary character.*

15. Wherein Actor A, at the expense of considerable self-sacrifice, gives the secondary character a gift. *The surprise is secured when it is revealed that the secondary character, by a similar act of self-sacrifice, has presented an equally desirable gift to Actor A.* Read GIFT OF THE MAGI[1] by O. Henry.

Note: The basic idea although old is still good if given a fresh twist.

16. Wherein Actor A tries to, or actually does, change his appearance or way of acting, *because he is convinced that the person he loves admires the appearance or manner assumed by Actor A.* The surprise is secured by the revelation that the secondary character heartily dislikes the assumed appearance or manner of Actor A, and loves Actor A because he does naturally have what Actor A considers an obnoxious appearance, or manner.

17. Wherein Actor A belittles or dislikes a person or object, or feels cynical about him or considers it unimportant or incapable of affecting his life, except as an obstacle or annoyance. *The surprise is secured when this object or person is the means of bringing great good to Actor A.*

18. Wherein Actor A accomplishes his purpose through the use he makes of a physical disability that is ordinarily a severe handicap. *Surprise is secured by the revelation of how this disability served in* PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT.

19. Wherein Actor A is shown as following a sequence of action involving sufficient danger to build enough suspense to hold reader-interest. When Actor A's purpose is accomplished it is revealed that

(a) the danger was very much greater than the reader supposed, or

(b) a far more important purpose was accomplished than the reader supposed. Or both (a) and (b).

20. Wherein Actor A, *because he misunderstands what is done or said or both, reaches an erroneous conclusion.* Acting on this erroneous conclusion, he reaches a surprising and happy conclusion or condition.

Note: This idea may be developed along serious, dramatic and strongly emotional lines, or along light, humorous lines.

21. Wherein Actor A is in a situation that arouses sympathy and

[1] Several collections of O. Henry's writings contain this story.

possibly active admiration also. A similar, or parallel situation is read aloud to Actor A from a newspaper, or it is dramatized on a radio program, or by some other means. *The surprise is secured by the revelation of the identity* of the writer of the newspaper or the writer or narrator of the radio program; he is closely related to Actor A and the story is the story of Actor A's situation.

22. Wherein Actor A *determines to achieve something important to him.* A minor character tells him he will fail; he is foolish to think he can possibly succeed as the chances are a hundred to one against him. Nevertheless, Actor A goes ahead and things turn out just as the minor character predicted. Actor A fails to secure what he went after. But suddenly, out of the failure, the real good Actor A sought becomes his, in an unexpected way and coming from an unexpected source, as a result of his action.

Note: This is good for dozens of objectives: money, advancement, a job, a girl, and so on indefinitely.

23. Wherein Actor A is shown *as performing acts that under ordinary circumstances would be wrong,* but under the conditions of the story, are right or at least justifiable. Someone—parent, teacher, employer, policeman, anyone in authority—*appears* strongly to disapprove to the point of inflicting punishment. The surprise is secured by revealing that the apparently disapproving person does not really disapprove at all, but on the contrary highly approves. Nevertheless he has a good reason for concealing his real attitude, and perhaps for even inflicting punishment, because Actor A did do enough apparent wrong to justify the reaction of the person in authority.

II. DRAMATIZING A THEME

Almost every short short has a theme of some kind, either stated or implicit in the material. But the basic ideas that follow are all clear-cut themes, sufficiently significant to form the backbone of a salable short short.

Before you start to plan a theme story be sure you know what a theme is, and what themes are usable. There seems to be a good deal of misunderstanding about these important points.

A *usable* theme is a brief statement of a generally accepted truth, or of an idea that the reader will readily accept—one that he feels is so significant that it needs emphasizing again and again.

An *unusable* theme is a statement that is open to controversy, or an idea that the reader is not likely to agree with readily.

A short short is not a good medium for preaching a sermon, or for expounding religious or political ideas. If you use it as such a medium you will not sell your story. Nevertheless, it is as good a medium as any for the use of themes that readers will accept.

"Jim was kind to his dog" is not a theme, it is a statement of a specific fact. Whereas "Kindness brings its own reward" is a theme, one that might serve as the basis for many short shorts.

"Mother love" is not a theme, "hatred" is not a theme, "revenge" is not a theme. They are all nouns, the name of something; that is, they are subjects. *But each might well be the basis for many themes.* For example, "Mother love casts out all selfishness," "Hatred breeds hatred," "Revenge brings no satisfaction."

Hence, *if you have a good theme, you have a good basic idea* for a short short, perhaps for many short shorts.

BASIC THEME IDEAS FOR THE SHORT SHORT

1. Wherein the divorce of parents brings suffering and permanent harm to the children.

2. Wherein habit, either mental or physical or both, is stronger than a sudden resolution or even a long held purpose. *Example:* A long established habit of obedience to orders or commands proves stronger than a violent resolution to kill.

3. If a parent, even though loving his child, fails to give time and personal attention to that child, he may deeply regret it.

4. Even people who appear to have lost all sense of responsibility will accept and faithfully discharge responsibility if they are convinced there is a good reason for them to do so.

5. The instinct to save life is stronger in a sudden emergency than the resolve previously determined upon to take a life.

6. Mother-love will motivate the greatest self-sacrifice.

7. People dislike the person who is always right, always does the noble thing, or always acts correctly; but this dislike may be turned to liking, even admiration, if or when the person does something wrong or incorrect, admits it and regrets it.

8. If a person is afraid, but acts as if he were brave in minor

crises, when the great test comes he will not only act with courage, but actually will not feel fear.

9. It is better to be deeply and completely happy with the one you love for a little while, even if great unhappiness follows, than to marry someone you do not love who will never cause you to be unhappy but with whom you will never know real happiness.

10. Mental suggestion, if repeated convincingly and cleverly, will influence, for good or bad, health, action, or emotion.

11. Parents are not sufficiently wise to take safely the responsibility of influencing their child concerning (a) whom he shall marry, or (b) when he shall marry, or (c) what kind of wedding he shall have.

12. A person who finds it possible or easy to express his emotions in actions, words, laughter, tears, actually feels no more, if as much, emotion as a person who is repressed, controlled, or inarticulate.

13. Small, everyday heroic acts are as important, even more important and more to be proud of than many spectacular feats of heroism that receive public acclaim and reward.

14. Fear of some specific dangerous condition or happening may serve to make a man's senses extraordinarily keen and alert to that condition or happening.

Example: Thus he may sense the approach of danger far more quickly than the brave man who feels no fear on this score. Sensing the danger, the man who feels fear takes precaution or actively prevents the danger from occurring, thus saving himself and others.

15. The person who deliberately or thoughtlessly starts a rumor will believe that same rumor when it returns to him.

16. If we fail to be kind to (a) someone we love, or (b) a casual acquaintance, even in a small matter, we may deeply regret it afterward because of the unfortunate effect of our unkindness on the secondary character.

17. Same as above, except that our regret is caused by having no further opportunity to be kind to the secondary character.

III. INGENUITY

The story of PURPOSE ACCOMPLISHMENT by means of INGENUITY is especially popular in the short short field. And deservedly so. It

lends itself to a natural, logical Surprise Ending, the surprise being achieved by the revelation of *just how the ingenuity* of Actor A solved the problem. The reader admires Actor A for his cleverness and is happy that he achieved success. This leaves the reader in a very pleasant frame of mind.

Frequently in a short short of this type Actor A is seen to be working toward the accomplishment of his real purpose, but *the means* by which he accomplishes it are kept hidden until the End. However, in other short shorts in this category, Actor A is seen working toward the accomplishment of a purpose that in the End is shown not to have been his real purpose at all. In that case the revelation of his real purpose comes as a surprise, as does the revelation of the way he accomplished it, so there is a double surprise at the End. This is, of course, especially desirable.

BASIC IDEAS EMPHASIZING INGENUITY

1. Wherein a man and a woman, who love each other and are either engaged or married, quarrel and are estranged. Either one sends a message to the other in an *ingenious* way, indirectly making known that his return is desired. This message is received and its significance understood by the one to whom it is sent. This person acts upon it and the two are reunited and happy once more.

2. Wherein Actor A, and Actor B, the villain or at least unlikable character, are in a situation where danger threatens both. Actor A succeeds in trading an apparently attractive or useful object to the villain for one that is apparently unattractive, or comparatively useless. The villain thinks he has made a good trade, one disadvantageous to Actor A. In the End it is revealed that Actor A *used his ingenuity* to secure from the villain the object that would save Actor A from the dangerous situation; whereas the object handed to the villain will be of no use whatever to him, Actor B, and will, therefore, in all probability bring disaster on him.

3. Wherein Actor A is forced by a criminal to help that criminal escape capture. Actor A is hated, of course unjustly, possibly by a representative of the law, who would like nothing better than to discover Actor A breaking a law. Actor A, while helping the criminal to escape, deliberately breaks a law in full view of the person who hates him, *as part of an ingenious plan* to defeat the criminal. The

villain is unaware that Actor A has broken a law, thinking he has the right to do as he does. The representative of the law, who dislikes Actor A, follows the escaping pair and apprehends them. Thus the criminal is taken into custody, and later explanations clear Actor A of all blame for his apparently criminal act.

4. An engaged or married couple have quarrelled over something intrinsically trivial, but there seems no way to make up. One—either one—*evolves an ingenious plan* to make himself appear to be imposed upon by a third person, or in imminent danger of physical injury. When this occurs the other rushes to his assistance. In the excitement all is forgiven and forgotten, and the two are happy once more. Surprise is secured by *withholding until the last line* the fact that the imposition or danger was not real, but the result of Actor A's ingenious planning.

5. Actor A's purpose is to win his spouse back to resuming their marriage after they are separated. While seeming to agree willingly to a divorce, Actor A cleverly gets his spouse, secondary character, herself to discuss the joys of living in a home, and so on. In the end the secondary character succumbs to her own arguments and asks that the matter of divorce be forgotten, and that the marriage be resumed.

6. Actor A, in order to achieve his purpose, tells part of the truth, which seems to the secondary character and to the reader as well, to be the whole truth. This causes the secondary character to believe the situation to be other than it is. He, therefore, follows a course of revelation of the whole truth.

Note: This basic idea is equally good for serious, dramatic stories and for light, humorous stories.

7. Actor A appears to agree, in all important particulars, with the secondary character. That he has a separate and opposing purpose of his own is not apparent in the Beginning or in the Body. In the End it is revealed he has all the time been putting into effect *an ingenious plan* to achieve a purpose unknown to the reader until that final moment. Of course, he is successful.

IV. EMOTION

When planning your story intended to build an emotion in the reader be sure you know *before you start to write* exactly what that

emotion is, and that it is one the reader likes to feel. The reader likes to suffer with story characters, *but he wants to suffer pleasantly.* Hence, when your story characters suffer, be sure they suffer beautifully and nobly, except of course in the case of villains. But even the villain must not suffer too much when the reader is looking at him. If the story requires that the villain suffer horribly—for instance, be tied to an ant hill, or die of thirst—have him do it off-stage and delicately imply the extent of his suffering. *Never force the reader to suffer with the villain,* when the suffering is physical and so intense that you, or the reader, cannot endure it without at least a reasonable amount of self-control.

BASIC IDEAS EMPHASIZING EMOTION

1. Wherein Actor A, very young or very old or ill or physically handicapped, resolutely fulfills a duty or accomplishes an admirable purpose.

Note: Be sure to build the emotions of admiration, sympathy, or pity. This basic idea lends itself to an infinite number of variations.

2. Wherein Actor A acts in a manner contrary to his personal loyalties in order to be true to a greater loyalty to an ideal, or to his country. He expiates himself, having sacrificed his personal loyalty by his death.

Note: The emotions created in this type of story will be the same as No. 1 above.

3. Wherein Actor A abandons a purpose of accomplishing a personal good in order that one person or many persons may be protected from harm that would never, if it came to them, be laid at his door.

Note: This makes his abandonment motivated by purely unselfish motives. The emotion is the same as No. 1.

4. Wherein Actor A, usually middle-aged or old, after having intensely desired for a long time possession of some object or achievement of some condition, but being prevented by circumstances from even trying to possess it, finally has his wish come true. But by this time what he has so long desired has become undesirable in fact, or at least the bloom is off it. Nevertheless, our hero still sees this attainment as possessing all its original attractiveness and glamour.

He feels a flawless happiness in getting what he has so long desired.

Note: Again the reader emotion is sympathy and a tender pity.

5. Wherein Actor A holds to an ideal or belief and lives up to that ideal or belief to his own disadvantage.

Note: The emotion built in the reader is that of admiration.

6. Wherein Actor A has done something that appears wrong and deserving of severe censure, yet he is shown as likable. In the End it is revealed that his apparently reprehensible act was justified and did no real harm, perhaps even resulted in good.

Note: Herein the emotion built is one of amusement and surprise.

7. Wherein Actor A deserves and hopes to receive indications of appreciation for highly meritorious service to others. But he does not receive it from the people he most directly served. In the End he does receive it from an unexpected source, perhaps one of the following: (a) Someone he has successfully opposed, (b) Someone who is far more important than those from whom Actor A hoped to receive appreciation, (c) One who is unimportant, but whose sincerity makes up for his other deficiencies.

Note: The reader emotion built is sympathy, admiration, and satisfaction that the story ended happily.

8. Wherein Actor A, a likable character, through a mistaken idea of what is right, or for the best, pursues a wrong course. The result brings suffering on the likable character and on those he loves. Actor A corrects his mistake by a dramatic act of self-sacrifice.

Note: Again the emotion built is the same as No. 1 above.

9. Wherein Actor A, weak, defenseless, uses his ingenuity so that the villain unconsciously, or because he cannot help himself, destroys the valuable object he seeks to obtain from Actor A. Actor A may or often does die while putting his plan into effect.

Note: The emotion here built is the same as No. 1.

10. Wherein Actor A, old, with little or no happiness left in his life, gives the object about which his memories of past happiness gather, to a young person in order to make that young person's big romantic moment happier and more nearly perfect.

Note: The emotion built is the same as No. 1.

11. Wherein Actor A, who prides himself in a mildly annoying way on always remembering birthdays, anniversaries, etc., proudly brings

a birthday gift to someone he loves. It turns out to be the birthday of someone else, someone whom the recipient of the gift heartily dislikes.

Note: The emotion built in the reader is amusement and a feeling toward Actor A of "good enough for him!" And surprise.

12. Wherein Actor A, a young man, seeks a young lady whom he had met momentarily and had scarcely seen. His only means of knowing her is through an ornament or something she wore. At last, after several attempts he finds a girl wearing the ornament he remembers. He immediately tells her he loves her and announces that she is having lunch with him. She objects, but he will not listen to her. Finally she agrees to go and a happy ending to the story is foreshadowed. The surprise in the End is the revelation that the girl he is taking out to lunch with the avowed intention of marrying her is not the same girl he previously met. The first girl gave the second girl the ornament she was wearing.

Note: Emotion built, amusement and surprise.

13. Wherein Actor A, who has deservedly or undeservedly suffered greatly in the past, saves someone from similar suffering that threatens, with or without great personal sacrifices.

Note: Emotion built, same as No. 1.

14. Wherein Actor A, who takes great pride in his reputation or standing, or the reputation or standing of his family, or of a single relative, sacrifices that pride for a greater good to his country, or city, or community, or to an individual he loves.

Note: Emotion built, same as No. 1.

V. SIMILARITIES OR PARALLELS

Readers like stories of this type because they point out and enable the reader to see *similarities between characters and situations* that at first glance seem to have no points of similarity at all. Not many such shorts are published, but I am inclined to think this is because ideas for such stories are hard to find, and not because editors are unwilling to buy them. Even if the parallel cases do have a number of obviously similar points, the reader enjoys *recognizing* these similarities. Many of these stories illustrate or prove a theme, which may be stated or may be implied.

If you think of, or observe, two situations that are to some extent

parallel, you probably have good basic material for a short short story of this type.

BASIC IDEAS SHOWING SIMILARITIES OR PARALLELS

1. Wherein Actor A has already made or is about to make an important decision concerning a course of action. The reader sees that he has taken or is likely to take the wrong course. Someone comes to him with a similar problem, not yet decided, seeking help in reaching a solution. Actor A, being able to see the problem of the secondary character objectively and, therefore, more clearly than he sees his own, helps the secondary character to reach the right, the wise, decision. Becoming conscious of the parallel between the two cases, Actor A then makes the right decision concerning his own affairs.

2. Wherein Actor A, many years before, made a decision regarding which of two courses he would take in life. Having made that decision he has followed it to success. But in doing this he sacrificed real happiness and he now knows that sacrifice was too great. The secondary character, young and at the beginning of his career, comes to Actor A with a parallel problem. You will observe that *Actor A does not tell the secondary character the story of his, Actor A's life.* This technique, you will remember, is practically taboo. In some *more dramatic way,* Actor A induces the secondary character to make the right decision. This is the decision that will bring the greatest ultimate happiness and satisfaction to the secondary character.

3. Same as above, except that the secondary character has already made the decision *not* to follow the line of his greatest ability, but to follow his heart instead. Actor A knows from his own experience, that the secondary character will later feel painful regret for having turned away from his art or profession or special skill for which he has outstanding ability. In order to save the secondary character from this regret, Actor A convinces the secondary character that he has no real ability in his art, profession or skill, and would never be more than a mediocre practitioner of it. Actor A thus insures the happiness, with no nagging regret for what might-have-been, of the secondary character.

4. Wherein characters are shown in a familiar present-day situation carrying forward a familiar sequence of action. Similar characters in a similar situation or sequence of events, taken from

well-known fiction, history, or mythology are presented cleverly and interestingly. *The parallel emphasizes and points up the significance of the action taking place in the present.*

5. Wherein Actor A, a parent, or other person in authority, strongly opposes a course of action determined upon by a young person in his care. Something drastic occurs that brings strongly to his mind a poignant memory of a parallel situation in his own youth, when he, too, was opposed by the wisdom of the age, but went contrary to it and achieved happiness in so doing. He reverses his judgment and gives his consent, or does not exercise his power to thwart the secondary character's following out his own plan.

VI. DRAMATIZING A PSYCHOLOGICAL TRUTH

The dramatization of psychological truths offers the short short writer at least as wide a field of basic ideas as does the dramatization of themes. There is practically no end to the possibilities, from a literary point of view. *Dramatizations of psychological truths and ideas may be adapted to almost any short short market,* and made acceptable to that market by intelligent slanting.

These psychological truths must, of course, be those that are *already familiar* to the reader, or ones that he will *readily accept* as true. Short fiction is not a suitable medium for expounding a subject unfamiliar to the reader, for giving abstract information about life, or for attempting to win the reader over to a pet belief or propaganda supported by the writer.

One of the great pleasures the reader gets from reading a well-conceived, well-organized and well-written psychological story is *the recognition of the basic truth behind the story*—a truth he already knows and one which he may, or may not, have thought out clearly. The aim of a writer of a psychological short short should be to make it possible for the reader to say to himself at the End of the story, "Yes, that's just the way this sort of thing works in real life. Now, take so-and-so . . ." And he remembers one or more similar incidents that are part of his own experience, or that he has read in histories, or articles, or other factual writing. Aside from the pleasure he feels from having read an interesting story, remember that the reader feels the two pleasures of recognition and of observing similarities and parallels.

The wise writer of short shorts, who makes it his business to know what the reader likes and enjoys, stands a far better chance of success by giving the reader just that and so selling his stories at good rates. To that end study the psychology of your readers no less assiduously than you study the psychology of your characters.

BASIC IDEAS DRAMATIZING A PSYCHOLOGICAL TRUTH

1. Wherein Actor A, or both Actor A and the secondary character, express certain beliefs and ideals or their adherence to certain standards of conduct. In the End, when action is demanded, they reveal that they are really motivated by a very different and exactly opposite set of beliefs, ideas, or standards of conduct.

Note: This may also be a theme story, the theme being that character and ingrained habits of thought, not surface ideas or thoughts, impel us to action.

2. Wherein Actor A, a villain, brings great trouble upon, perhaps kills, an innocent, admirable, defenseless person. But the defenseless person uses a psychological weapon against the villain that eventually brings about *retributive justice.* That is, consciously he impresses some idea, or event on the mind of the villain, the memory of which later tortures, perhaps mentally unbalances that villain.

3. Wherein the main character is mentally weak, cowardly, with no will of his own, or physically ill. After an admirable secondary character has carefully strengthened and given courage to the main character, the main character goes to the other extreme—becomes bold, fanatical, brutal, afraid of nothing. In the End he turns his newly-developed mental and physical strength against his benefactor and kills or otherwise seriously harms him.

4. Wherein two characters who love each other deeply are naturally inarticulate and cannot say to each other what they feel, but can only talk of trivialities. Danger to one causes the other to be sure that if the loved one returns safely he or she can then put into words the deep feeling between them. Danger over, they are reunited, but as before they can only talk of commonplaces. Yet now this is sufficient for them. Their love for each other is somehow communicated through the everyday phrases they use; that is, through their everyday talk about everyday things.

5. Wherein Actor A, threatened by physical danger, or assailed by

temptation, is about to take the weak, the despicable course. Suddenly the danger, or the temptation, is removed. Actor A immediately forgets how near he came to acting in a far from admirable manner. He is contemptuous of the force, situation or person that so short a time before defeated him and thinks of himself as invincible against such temptation.

6. Wherein Actor A feels he is an outsider in a family, or group, either large or small. He defies the group, breaks its rules, thinks he hates it. Something (perhaps danger to the group) happens that causes him to feel he belongs to that group, is accepted by them. Immediately he becomes loyal to the group and works wholeheartedly for its good.

7. Same as above, except that an individual is cast in the role of the group. The group dislikes, fears an individual, but in the end reverses its judgment as a group.

VII. THE IRONIC SITUATION

Life is full of ironic situations. Situations in which people, by their actions, bring about results exactly opposite to the results they want or hope to get. Situations in which people come to believe the opposite of the truth. Situations in which people, with no intention of doing so, either harm or help someone else. Situations in which people inadvertently and unconsciously do that which they have proclaimed loudly they never will do, and so on endlessly.

The trained observer has only to remember past experiences and to look about him in the present to find plenty of basic ideas for ironic short shorts.

BITER-BIT stories are all ironic stories, but they are a distinct type within the general classification and so are put under a heading of their own later in this chapter.

Readers especially like ironic stories, but these, excluding the BITER-BIT type, are, in common with stories having a psychological basis, somewhat difficult to present by means of dramatic action. However, the difficulty is one that can be overcome by recognizing it and deliberately taking steps to overcome it. This can usually be done by *showing the mental processes of the actors by what they do, and say;* while actually going into their consciousness and directly giving their thoughts *as little as possible.* Likewise *it is necessary*

that there be clash, conflict, obstacles, and *suspense* in these stories. They should almost never be what is called "think pieces," or stream-of-consciousness stories. It is too difficult to get and hold reader interest with these two types of presentation. A writer should not attempt to use them until after he has become at least a semi-professional. But the ironic short short, dramatically written, stands a very good chance of selling.

BASIC IDEAS THAT ARE IRONIC

1. A child, or an adult *who is naïve and unsophisticated,* looks forward to seeing some great or famous personage whom he imagines as glamorous, and whom he looks up to with a feeling of hero-worship. The great person is seen. He is unpretentious, simple in appearance. In his party, or accompanying him, is an unimportant person who looks important to our hero and who fulfills in appearance all those wonderful dreams. Actor A believes this person is the one he has come to see, and so is completely happy and suffers no disillusionment.

Note: This also may be classified as the story type in which Actor A does not understand the true situation, but the reader does.

2. Wherein Actor A, *unaware of the real aims and purposes of the villain,* inadvertently and without planning to do so, brings about the defeat of the villain. Actor A may, or may not, have an understanding of the situation at the end.

Note: In stories of this type, Fate, or Providence, acts as the real Actor A, working through, or using as a means, a character in the story.

3. Same as above, except Actor A, a villain, brings about the success of a likable secondary character *without having planned to do so.*

4. Wherein Actor A, a villain, *deliberately plans* to harm a likable secondary character, or gain some selfish end that entails no real harm for the secondary character. The villain's plans fail, so far as he is concerned, but what he does brings great good to the likable character.

5. Wherein Actor A is held in high esteem for some specific admirable act. In the End it is revealed that he is really a villain and performed the admirable act because impelled by despicable motives. The Surprise Ending is that those who honor him never know the truth.

VIII. THE CINDERELLA STORY

The Cinderella story is held in disrepute by some who pride themselves on their sophistication and their cultivated literary taste. They say the Cinderella story is not true to life, since it shows goodness being rewarded with happiness, and that in real life this doesn't happen. This is a strange conclusion, and one not borne out by observable facts.

Every unbiased person will willingly admit that people who are pleasant, kind, beautiful, or were born with magnetic personalities attract many kinds of good to themselves, with no conscious effort. Much that is painful may happen to them, too, but that does not affect the truth that good often comes to them as a result of *what they are,* and not of *what they do* within the story. No one story, regardless of its length, can or even should present all the truth about life, all the facets of living. A story to have unity, effectiveness and interest, *must choose one truth, one facet of life* and *present that.* Otherwise, the story will be a confused jumble, without pattern or order and, consequently, without artistic qualities.

Let it ever be remembered that the artist takes the raw materials of life and by his talent or his genius molds them into coherent forms, or patterns, having beauty and significance.

The Cinderella story, properly planned and written, is every bit as true to life as the story of undeserved frustration and defeat. Intrinsically, one is no less and no more artistic and true to life than the other. And the great practical difference that the writer who wants to sell should consider well is that far more readers like the Cinderella story than the story that is its opposite, the story of *undeserved* defeat and frustration. Of course, if you are indifferent as to whether you sell your work or not and write exclusively for your own pleasure, then you need not consider what the reader likes best. Or even what he likes at all.

BASIC IDEAS FOR THE CINDERELLA SHORT SHORT

1. Wherein the major character, Actor A, acts in an unselfish manner, with no thought of reward for what he does. He may or may not have a wish he desires fulfilled; if so, he does not work for it, because he has no hope of having his wish fulfilled. In other words,

it seems impossible of fulfillment. As a direct result of his unselfish acts, the wish is fulfilled in a surprising manner.

Note: This is the basic plan of all Cinderella stories. Other plans given in this category are merely variations of the above plan, with added complications.

2. Wherein Actor A longs for some object, or some condition, that he believes will bring him great happiness and satisfaction. He hopes, but is not sure, that this object or condition will be his. *Suspense is built as to whether or not his wish will be fulfilled.* In the End it comes about in a surprising way, because of his admirable qualities of character or attractive personality, but *not* because of anything he *consciously* does within the story with the purpose of achieving the good end he desires.

3. Wherein Actor A has a strong wish for something, or perhaps only a need for something seemingly so impossible of attainment that he makes no effort to achieve it. A strong purpose develops within the story, the purpose of Actor A to accomplish something *having no apparent connection with his wish or need.* He is moved to accomplish this purpose by an unselfish motive and it involves the good of another person or group of persons, or of society. Actor A accomplishes this purpose through *Courage,* or *Ingenuity,* or *Special Capacity,* or a *Weapon.* Then, as a result of his unselfish action, and in a surprising way, Actor A receives his wish-fulfillment.

Note: This is the basic plan of stories involving a reward for capturing a criminal, for winning a prize or award, receiving a legacy, an offer of a desirable job, or any other good that comes through more or less accident or chance. A definite purpose *is achieved first,* then the reward comes as icing on the cake. Not as an end in itself.

IX. THE BITER-BIT PLOT

This particular branch of the family of ironic stories has been so thoroughly discussed in the chapter on the plotted short short (see Chapter V) that little more needs to be said here. The BITER-BIT story with a fresh idea, well presented, is readily salable in the top general-interest markets and to men's and adventure magazines. Women's magazines of all grades are not especially receptive to a BITER-BIT story. Neither are many of the other second and third grade publications, with a very few exceptions.

The pleasure the reader derives from the BITER-BIT story is largely a sense of satisfaction that the villain is not only defeated, but that he was directly instrumental in bringing about his own defeat. *Unless the villain does bring about his own defeat by action, within the story,* it is not a BITER-BIT story because this is the BITER-BIT'S distinguishing feature.

Another distinguishing feature is that the villain is the blackest possible villain, and the likable character is entirely admirable, helpless, and apparently defenseless against the evil plans of the villain. This *gives sharp contrast,* and the drama and suspense that is so essential to the successful BITER-BIT story.

BASIC IDEAS FOR THE BITER-BIT SHORT SHORT

1. Wherein Actor A *brings about his own defeat* because while following his own plan to achieve an evil and selfish purpose, he sent away, destroyed, or left behind an object, or a person, that in the end was necessary to his success. Not having this object or person at hand, he fails to achieve his wicked purpose.

2. Wherein Actor A deliberately and as part of his plan for success, destroys a good character trait, or a habit of good behavior that he possesses. At the End he cannot succeed without that character trait, or habit of good behavior that he now lacks. Therefore, he fails.

3. Wherein Actor A plans to harm a likable character. As part of his plan he puts in the possession of the likable character, or induces the likable character to get, the physical means or weapon or object that in the End traps or kills or otherwise defeats the villain himself, with or without the intervention of the likable character.

4. Wherein Actor A, while following what he thinks is a perfect plan for harming a likable character and/or escaping justice, arouses suspicion and brings about his defeat because he has been too careful. That is, more careful than a law-abiding person would think of being.

5. Wherein Actor A plans to secure for himself a valuable object from a likable, defenseless character. In removing, or overcoming, the obstacles between him and the achievement of his purpose, he unconsciously destroys or irrevocably loses the valuable object. The Surprise Ending is the revelation of how and when Actor A destroyed the object he planned to get. The reader has, of course, seen him

destroy it, but has been unaware of the significance of the action at that point.

6. Wherein Actor A plans to harm a likable character. In carrying out his plan he overlooks special knowledge of conditions, etc., in the possession of the secondary character. Because of his ignorance of these special conditions, Actor A makes himself vulnerable to attack. And so is defeated by the secondary character who knows how to take advantage of the special condition.

X. STORIES OF MISUNDERSTANDING, DISCOVERY AND REVERSAL

In the field of the short short the story of PURPOSE ABANDONMENT and the story of reversal so closely resemble each other that it simplifies matters to classify them together. The pure reversal short short, shows an Actor A who has no clearcut purpose, *unless* adhering to a custom, or habit, or state of mind or character trait, may be considered a purpose. In the End he reverses his belief that the custom, or habit, or state of mind, or character trait is desirable.

However, when the short short of reversal bears a closer resemblance to the long short PURPOSE ABANDONMENT story, Actor A does have a purpose, more or less sharply defined. But unlike the long short treatment, in a short short Actor A has no time to make more than one attempt to achieve his purpose. That one attempt is made, or Actor A plans to make it, *at the climax of the story.* At this point *something happens* that brings about the reversal of purpose. You see, he doesn't just change his mind for no reason at all. Or because of something he remembers. Or because he reasons out things for himself unimpelled by dramatic happenings at the moment. I repeat, *something happens to Actor A that brings about the reversal of his purpose.*

Readers like dramatic, emotional stories of reversal, as such stories necessarily make use of contrast and surprise, both of which the reader finds agreeable. A comparatively large number of reversal short shorts are published. They may be found in every publication field making use of short shorts, slanted of course to the particular market in which they appear. Semi-religious magazines like them, sophisticated magazines like them, women's magazines of all grades

like them, and they are often seen in the big general-interest magazines.

BASIC IDEAS FOR STORIES OF MISUNDERSTANDING, DISCOVERY AND REVERSAL

1. Wherein Actor A strongly dislikes, or actively hates a likable character who takes care of Actor A, or is in some way necessary to him. In time Actor A no longer needs the likable secondary character, but the secondary character has become dependent on Actor A. Actor A surprisingly accepts responsibility for the secondary character and finds he is in reality devoted to him.

2. Wherein Actor A, happily married, discovers a person of the same sex whose past life parallels his in some important particulars, has same education, same ambitions. The outstanding difference is that the secondary character lives alone, his marriage, too, gone on the rocks. Actor A neglects his spouse to work with or be with this secondary character. He leans more and more toward this friend's way of thinking and of acting—he, too, believes that marriage is bound to be a failure. Suddenly our hero discovers that his neglect of his spouse has brought his own marriage close to disaster. *The shock causes him to reverse his belief* that he and the secondary character are alike in all important ways. He realizes that he and his friend are completely different in their ideas about the importance of marriage and companionship with a loved one. This reversal is then acted upon to save the threatened marriage of Actor A.

3. Wherein a young man and a young woman, not married, are on their way to spend a weekend together. They love each other, but are agreed that it is not wise for them to marry until later, though there is no insurmountable obstacle to their immediate marriage. Something dramatic happens that causes them to reverse their decision and take steps to be married immediately.

4. Wherein Actor A resents, and therefore thinks he dislikes, the secondary character, a newcomer with whom he is expected to share privileges, or desirable possessions, or attention, or affection, or any combination of these. One especially desirable possession or privilege he refuses to share. At the End something happens that shows the hero that the secondary character is as unhappy as he, Actor A, is. Understanding and sympathy cause him to reverse his way of think-

ing and his feeling toward the secondary character. Actor A offers to share with him the formerly withheld possession or privilege.

5. Wherein Actor A misunderstands the actions or words of the secondary character, placing the worst possible interpretation upon them. He comes to the point of planning to break off all friendly relationship with the secondary character. Our hero then discovers the truth concerning the secondary character, and as a result reverses his estimate of the secondary character and his plan of action regarding him.

6. Same as above, except that from the Beginning each character misunderstands and suspects the other. The rest of the story proceeds similarly to No. 5, ending in a double reversal and a double surprise.

7. Wherein Actor A shows active dislike of a sentimental custom, or object, person or an animal such as a cat, dog, horse, bird, and so on. In the End the object of Actor A's dislike is the means of bringing great good to Actor A. This causes a reversal of both the thought and action of the hero.

8. Wherein Actor A has lost confidence in himself, in his ability to cope successfully with life, to succeed in his work. He is faced with a situation demanding the utmost from him in confidence and skill if he is to succeed. If he fails, he will fail irretrievably. Actor A is about to give up, not even to try, when a crisis arises in the lives of minor characters that only the skill of Actor A can resolve successfully. Without thinking, he takes care of the situation perfectly. This proves to him that he still has the necessary skill to achieve success, so the hero reverses his mental attitude and abandons his decision not to try for success.

9. Wherein Actor A works wholeheartedly to achieve a purpose. When the fulfillment of this purpose is within his grasp, he finds he doesn't want it. But it is revealed that Actor A's efforts, quite without intention, have brought him a quite different, a never thought of, but well worth-while reward and satisfying happiness. He then reverses his idea of what he really wants from life.

10. Wherein Actor A has suffered much from the selfishness of a secondary character. When the story opens the secondary character steals money or other valuable property from Actor A. Actor A determines to turn the secondary character over to the police. At the End he reverses this purpose, makes up his mind not to turn the secondary

character over to the police. The reason for this reversal, which furnishes the surprise, is that although the secondary character stole the money or other valuable property, great good, great happiness has come to Actor A. So the hero feels only pity for the secondary character, who will never get any good from what he dishonestly appropriated.

XI. INDIRECT PRESENTATION

In using indirect presentation in the short short, the reader is not told the story in an obvious way. Upon reading the story superficially, taking what is said at its face value, there appears to be no unified or significant story. *But there is a highly significant story implicit in the text,* a story that the reader sees clearly. However, in creating this type of short short there is a "must" for the writer to remember: that is, to have one or more story characters who do *not understand the significance of the story action.* All of which means (a) the story characters do not know what it means and are puzzled by it, or (b) they have no idea that it means anything, or (c) they think it adds up to something but are mistaken in their conclusions as to what that something is.

The reader likes this type of story because it makes him feel clever, keen, discerning. He knows something that one or more characters in the story do not know. He understands what one or more characters in the story do not understand. So, unconsciously, he pats himself on the back as a very smart fellow indeed. This is a most enjoyable feeling. If you can give it to the reader, along with an interesting story, you'll get a check for that manuscript.

Yet, there is one exception to those noted in the first paragraph. That is the short short in which *all the characters understand the action,* but *all conspire to pretend* they are doing something they are not doing in reality; striving to achieve one purpose when they are in reality bending every effort to achieve a very different purpose. Back of the pretense the reader, feeling very clever indeed, sees the real story progressing to its real goal. Such a story might concern a group of people determined to secure justice for one of their number. If the truth becomes known, justice will not be meted out. So the group manages to tell a white lie in order that good may triumph. No one in the story ever admits, even to the other characters, that what

they all know to be a lie, is not the truth. This basic idea is, of course, capable of an infinite number of variations.

BASIC IDEAS FOR STORIES OF INDIRECT PRESENTATION

1. Wherein Actor A, either a child or an adult, is involved in a situation that he thinks he understands, but which he really does not understand, or only partly understands. The real situation is, however, made clear to the reader.

2. Same as above, with strong admiration, or a blend of admiration and sympathy, built for Actor A, admiration and sympathy that Actor A is completely unconscious that he deserves.

3. Wherein Actor A does something very admirable that he thinks nothing of, considering it merely a commonplace action or one that is no more than his simple duty to perform. The reader, however, is fully aware of the extraordinary unselfishness, or heroism, or devotion, of Actor A.

4. Wherein a minor character (Actor C) informs Actor A of facts that vitally affect Actor A, but the minor character has no idea that what he says has more than a passing interest for the hero. Actor A, acting on the knowledge so casually imparted to him by the minor character, changes his plans and course of action, and so achieves an important, happiness-giving result. The reader knows, either while the information is being given to Actor A, or at the End, that the facts related have great significance to Actor A, but the minor character never knows this.

5. Wherein Actor A is, so far as the other story characters know, working toward one goal, or the accomplishment of one purpose. In reality he is working toward another and quite different one. The reader is (a) aware of Actor A's real purpose all the time, or (b) he is not aware of it until the End, where it is revealed as a surprise.

XII. THE COURAGE PLOT

Every reader likes a good story of courage. It gives him an opportunity to experience emotions he enjoys feeling, among them being admiration for Actor A, and satisfaction in the triumphs and deserved happiness of Actor A.

On the whole, the story of physical courage is easier to write than

the story of moral courage. The story of physical courage requires dramatic action; it cannot be written without dramatic action. But the story of moral courage, being a story of mental conflict with the actual story taking place in the hero's mind, must be *deliberately planned* so that *this mental conflict is externalized, shown through dramatic action.*

In the story of physical courage the writer may safely go into the consciousness of Actor A far more than he can safely go into the mind of Actor A in a story of moral courage. A story of moral courage should be told as nearly objectively as possible. This viewpoint will force the writer to explain mental processes, or *show mental processes* and *mental conflict* in *dramatic action.*

BASIC IDEAS FOR SHORT SHORTS OF COURAGE

1. Wherein Actor A is ill, wounded, a prisoner, or in some other dramatic situation where death would be a merciful release from further inevitable suffering. But Actor A refuses to accept death, at least not until he has had the opportunity to accomplish one more unselfish act. It seems impossible that he should have the opportunity to perform such an act, but the opportunity offers. By rallying all his strength of body and will and courage, he accomplishes his purpose. This done, he is either killed by the opposing and defeated force; or he dies as the result of the effort to accomplish his purpose; or he is saved—depending on the story material and the emotional effect the writer desires to create.

2. Wherein Actor A forces himself to do something he is afraid to do, in order to preserve and not destroy the respect and pride felt toward him by the secondary character. The surprise is that he feels no fear when he actually does what he previously feared to do.

3. Wherein Actor A achieves his goal, or defeats the villain, by an unexpected display of either physical or moral courage. If moral courage is used, care must be taken to make sure the action is dramatic, the final crisis and climax sharp.

4. Wherein Actor A courageously accepts and discharges a duty requiring moral or physical courage, or both.

5. Wherein Actor A recovers courage he has previously lost, by doing some difficult, dangerous act, often the repetition of the act that was the cause of his losing his courage.

6. Wherein Actor A, weak, timid, fearful, acts with a high degree of courage when someone he loves is threatened with disaster. Of course he succeeds in saving the loved one.

XIII. THE INTERESTING SITUATION

Of course all short shorts require an interesting situation. But in this category belong the stories that are primarily the presentation of an interesting situation, without plot or progressive action *within the story*. The situation may be dramatic, or strange, or emotional, or amusing; or have any other quality that makes for story interest.

These interesting situation stories should always be told as happening in the immediate past, though the real action of the story took place in the distant past. They may be told to someone by a minor character narrator, or they may be told in dialogue, with only enough action while the story is being told to keep the scene "alive." This is a very rich field for the clever writer, as it permits him to present almost any interesting situation he may see, or imagine, in the short short form—the only literary form in which a situation, an episode or an incident can be presented acceptably without building it into plot.

In these interesting situation stories there is, of course, a progressive unfolding of the situation so the reader may comprehend it, but there is no change in the relationship of the characters. That relationship remains the same throughout. In fact, it is that very relationship that often creates the poignancy of the story, and any change in the relationship would be very highly detrimental to the effect the writer plans to create. This is diametrically opposed to the necessity, in most other types of short shorts, that the relationship of the characters be different at the End of the story from what it was at the Beginning of the story.

These situation short shorts are a challenge to the writer and are among the most interesting to plan and create. They are most likely to sell to women's magazines of all grades and to the top general-interest magazines.

BASIC IDEAS FOR SHORT SHORTS OF INTERESTING SITUATION

1. Wherein Actor A's chief characteristic is pride in his financial success. He shows this character trait in action, giving away a sub-

stantial sum of money, or a piece of valuable property to prove to an individual or to his community that he is a financial success. The surprise in the End is secured by revealing that the money or property given away was the last money or property the hero has.

Note: Almost any character trait motivating extravagant and surprising action may be used as a basis for a short short of this type.

2. Wherein Actor A prides himself on the possession of an unusual *special capacity*, or a *familiar special capacity* to an extraordinarily high degree. In the End he unselfishly uses, in a surprising way, this *special capacity* to protect or otherwise help the secondary character to his own disadvantage.

3. Wherein Actor A belongs to a profession demanding the greatest possible personal publicity, even to the smallest details of his private life. He likes this publicity and gladly shares with the public his likes and dislikes, all that happens to him, his emotional experiences, etc. However, the story deals with the *immediate situation* that involves the necessity for him to identify himself positively in a message he must send to his wife, a message that cannot be written, but must be sent by word of mouth. The only way he can unmistakably identify himself is to include in his message reference to some happening or situation that is known only to them. Yet he fails to identify himself, because there is no such happening or situation, since his private life has been shared so completely with the public.

Note: This basic plan can be varied to fit the special conditions that characterize almost any profession, business, art, or occupation. For example, a lawyer might fail in winning a wife because of an ingrained habit of reverting to legal terms when strongly moved emotionally, or when he especially wanted to be emphatic or clearly understood.

5. Wherein Actor A, a likable, sympathetic character, clings to an old-fashioned, or outmoded ideal or code of conduct. He finds himself in a modern situation where he will suffer unhappiness or at least deprivation of some good unless he abandons this ideal or ceases to act on this code of conduct. This he refuses to do, because he thinks it would be wrong, or at least a letting down of the high standard of conduct he has set for himself.

6. Wherein Actor A believes himself to possess either an admirable character trait of which he is very proud, or to possess a character

trait that is far from admirable and of which he is heartily ashamed. In the End it is revealed that (a) he does not possess the admirable character trait, or (b) he does not possess the bad character trait. This is made clear to the reader. Actor A himself may know the truth at the End. Or he may continue in his erroneous belief concerning himself, depending on the story material and the effect desired by the writer.

Method of Study

1. Go over the analyses already made by you for your reference file of short shorts and add to the basic ideas given in this chapter any new ones discovered by you.
2. In your continuing analyses of short shorts, add new basic ideas to the list given in this chapter.

Part VI

DRAMATIC RELATIVES OF THE MAGAZINE SHORT SHORT

CHAPTER XXI

The Moving Picture Short

(THE SHORT SHORT OF THE SCREEN)

THE dramatic moving picture short, as distinguished from other short features of the screen such as the usual animated cartoon, the news reel, the travelogue, etc., bears a close family resemblance to the magazine short short. Yet it is by no means the same in every particular. When the writer of magazine short shorts turns to writing screen shorts *he is using a different medium and appealing to a different audience.* However, the writer, who has attentively studied the technique of the magazine short short and has learned by practice to use it effectively, should have little trouble in turning his knowledge and skill to good use in this, to him, new field—the motion picture short. It is a *matter of selection* and *adaptation,* rather than of learning something entirely new. First let us take a look at the medium itself, and see how it differs from the medium of the short short.

The skilled artist in any field always *carefully considers the inherent qualities of his medium, even before he selects his subject.* An artist who uses water colors does not select the same landscape for portrayal as does the artist who uses oils. An artist whose medium is pastels does not select for his subject a prize fighter. Such a subject would not be suited to his medium, but would lend itself readily to lithograph, or to a statue made from bronze. So the writer of moving picture shorts must consider the specific requirements of his medium.

The screen appeals first and most strongly to the eye. Therefore, it is best suited to the *portrayal of action,* movement. As important as dialogue is to the moving picture, action is far more important.

Hence, your moving picture short should be such that it can be *told mainly in terms of action.*

The next time you go to a moving picture watch carefully how many times there will be no dialogue at all, for both short and long time lapses. Sometimes soft mood-music will be used during these spaces of action without dialogue, and at other times there will be no sound at all to distract the audience from the tense action on the screen.

The action on the screen may at times be dramatic, even violent, but this is by no means always necessary. Action may be slow, quiet, restrained, consist of no more than a barely perceptible change of facial expression, a slight but significant shift of posture, the movement of one finger. All that is required is *that the action be significant,* that it *mean something to the plot* and *to the emotional value of the story.* Watch the good actors, both men and women, of the screen for their subtle actions and movements that put the story over. True, this part of the story is largely, in the final analysis, up to the director, but unless you, the writer, *see your movie short in terms of action,* it isn't likely you will sell your original. For your task as a writer of movie shorts is to write them in such a way that the person who buys stories for the screen will see your story *in terms of action,* as he reads. Just how to do this will be taken up later when we learn *how to prepare* a movie short synopsis.

In writing for the screen, the author not only has to consider his medium, but also he must consider the audience that is necessitated by that medium. A magazine short short is written to appeal to *an audience of one,* the lonely reader—though of course that single reader is multiplied many times. The magazine reader reads your story, an *individual, alone* in the imaginary world he himself has created from the materials you have given him. Unless he is interrupted by strong outside stimuli—or you fail to hold his interest—he does not emerge from that imaginary world until the story is finished.

The writer of the moving picture short short also appeals to an individual, but an individual who is now a spectator, and who is *part of a large group.* Thus, the scenario writer has to meet a new set of conditions and demands. The demands of the eye for action and movement, we have already briefly considered. Now we must con-

sider the matter of *group psychology.* The writer of moving picture shorts does not have to work nearly as hard for laughter or for tears, or for any emotion, as does the writer of magazine short shorts. This does not mean that careless, sloppy thinking or writing will get you any farther in the moving picture field than in the magazine field. It only means that if your story makes a genuine and sincere appeal to the emotions, either serious emotions or the emotions we designate as "light," you will get a stronger reaction, generally speaking, from a motion picture audience than from a reader. Smiles, laughter, tears, all are more readily evoked under the influence of group psychology.

The screen demands the greatest amount of change, movement, variety but at the same time offers the greatest opportunity to secure these desirable qualities. You can safely *change scenes many more times* in a movie short than in a magazine short, and still preserve an effect of unity. Some of the reasons are as follows:

1. *The ease with which transitions in time and space are made.* When writing for the screen you need only have an actor mention the wheat field on Uncle Lem's farm, and the audience is prepared to accept the next scene, which *is* in Uncle Lem's wheat field. Also, you need take no time or words to describe the wheat field. It is there, before the spectator's eyes for him to *see for himself.* The spectator does not have to go through the mental process, however swift, of creating the new scene; it has been created for him in the picture down to the smallest detail.

2. Since sight works so quickly, only a second or two is required for the spectator to become fully cognizant of all the details that particularly interest him in any scene. After that, unless his interest is caught and held by changing action, he quickly becomes bored. Try looking unwaveringly at one object for more than a few seconds and you will see what I mean. The eye reaches a state of boredom, or lack of interest in the repetition of one set of responses more quickly than any other sense perception we have. That is why you must keep your moving picture moving all the time. Of course there should never be action for the mere sake of action; *the story itself must be moved forward by means of action that does something for the story.*

Long speeches by your actors are, of course, out. Everything your actors say must be pithy and to the point, *in character,* and, above all, *brief.* In the movie short, *dialogue is used to point up action* and

not to take the place of action. You, as reader, will remember that now we are using the word "action" to designate *any significant movement* that *builds* your story.

The movie short—with the exception of one type of animated cartoon and the purely slapstick, or "chase" picture—should have real substance. It should "say something" over and above the story itself. A familiar and universally accepted theme that is easily recognized at the Beginning of the picture and stressed until the End is an excellent way of getting this necessary substance, or significance. But remember that the theme you select must be one that you can *show by dramatic action* and that *does not depend* for its intelligibility on talk alone. Almost without exception Walt Disney's short features have a theme and are also constructed according to a clearly discernible plot pattern or plan. That is, these attributes can be seen by those who are trained in professional methods of organizing literary material. *This one fact* accounts in a great measure for Walt Disney's phenomenal success, for the practically universal enthusiastic acclaim with which his work is received. The type of animated cartoon that starts nowhere, ends nowhere, and has no climax and no significance gets laughs, to be sure, mainly because of the group psychology we have mentioned. But after this type of short feature is finished almost no one, not even he who laughed the loudest while the film was in progress, thinks of the picture as satisfying entertainment. Or has anything to remember about the picture afterwards.

The synopsis of your moving picture short, which is the form in which you will submit it to your agent for him in turn to submit to the Story Department of a studio, may contain no dialogue. Or it may contain only a few lines of dialogue *sufficient to indicate the characteristic way* in which the actors speak. Rarely does a synopsis contain a large percentage of dialogue. Unless you are a genius at screen dialogue, much or all of what you have put down will be changed by the screen writers on the lot when they are writing the shooting script for your story. Hence most writers of original screen shorts include in their synopses no more dialogue than is needed to *indicate* character and the individual way in which each speaks.

Many film studios, and all the large ones, have on their staffs a number of people who do nothing but write dialogue for pictures-in-the-making. Few free-lance writers, accustomed only to writing

dialogue for magazine stories, can compete with these specialists trained in writing *screen* dialogue. Generally speaking, it is a waste of time to try. But if you are especially good at dialogue, don't let this stop you. Go ahead and write the very best dialogue you can for your moving picture short short. The cleverness and pithiness of the lines your actors speak may serve to sell your story, even if the action is weak. Some staff writer in the studio can step up the action.

If you decide to include more than the minimum amount of dialogue in your moving picture short, remember that *every word must be necessary to the unfolding of the story.* On the screen there is no such thing as talk for talk's sake, as is sometimes done, successfully, in a stage play. In a moving picture short a thin story plot cannot be camouflaged with sparkling, but, in so far as the story is concerned, pointless conversation. *You must have a story first.* This story may be plotted, or it may be one of the many planned varieties of stories, such as a story illustrating a theme, the presentation of a situation that is emotionally appealing, and so on. There is practically no limit to the *kind* of story that may be told in a moving picture short, providing the story is simple, concerned with *one single line of interest* and builds to *one clear-cut effect.* There is no place in a moving picture short, any more than in a magazine short, for a complicated story, a large number of actors, and a blurred emotional and dramatic effect. Why? Because there is too much material for a short short, and a full-length picture is needed where such factors must be included.

The playing time of a screen short is generally about ten minutes. This bears no relation to the length of the synopsis. This may be anything from one page to ten pages long, depending on the detail with which the story idea is developed, the amount of dialogue included, and so on. Generally, the more briefly the story idea is stated the better, but clarity of presentation and drama of this central idea should not be sacrificed to brevity. It is the *story that counts,* and the degree of *its adaptability to presentation in terms of action.* Of course, you know that your synopsis is usually *written in the present tense.*

Let us suppose that you have thought of a story that is suitable to presentation on the screen as a moving picture short. You have written it in synopsis form with emphasis on the action that unfolds the

story, and you have done this as well as you know how. Now you are faced by the question of how to sell your brain child. Let us see how to go about this:

First, there are a few *don'ts:*

Don't send your manuscript directly to a moving picture studio. No one there will read your manuscript, or even open the envelope in which you have enclosed it. The script will be returned to you with a note to the effect that no unsolicited material is read. The reason for this is that there have been so many plagiarism suits filed unjustly against them, that studios are not going to make themselves liable to a subsequent action by the examination of material presented in this manner to them. You have to be an established writer, personally known to the studio before you can get past this barrier. And practically no known, established writer approaches a studio that way. It isn't good business. A writer works through an accredited agent. And that is the way you, too, will have to work if you want to see your stories on the screen.

Don't select an agent quickly, carelessly, or on the advice of friends. Try to find out about agents yourself. Perhaps someone inside the movie industry *who really knows about agents* will help you. One agent who is fine when it comes to selling westerns may be a complete flop when it comes to selling a top-flight story for an A picture or a first-class short. And *vice versa*. Some agents have judgment and initiative and are good salesmen. Others don't know a good story from a bad, and can sell only stories that would sell themselves, provided in any other way they could be brought to the attention of the men who buy screen stories.

Use your best judgment in selecting an agent, then try to sell yourself and your story to him. Agents are in business to make money. If an agent doesn't think he can sell your story he will not accept it.

Do not be discouraged if the first agent you contact turns you down. That doesn't mean that your story is unscreenable; it only means that that agent *thinks it will not make a good screen story.* The next agent who looks at it may see its wonderful possibilities and sell it to an important studio. If you have used the technique presented in this book in building your story, while it may not be a masterpiece, it should at least have good possibilities for dramatic presentation on the screen.

Perhaps the agent will offer suggestions as to how you can improve your story. If these suggestions seem at all reasonable and practical to you, revise your synopsis so that it embodies them. The use of the agent's ideas may touch off his enthusiasm for your story to the point where he will accept it and sell it. To a beginner, a sale is that important first step on the rung of the ladder of success. Achieve it at whatever cost to your "artistic" sensibilities.

Your study thus far has brought you to the point where you know how to analyze a screen short, what to look for in a screen short that will guide and help you in writing your own original work in this medium. You will gain a great deal by a careful study of dramatic moving picture shorts of all kinds, from the most trifling of animated cartoons to the artistic achievements in this field of the brilliant and versatile radio and screen writer, Arch Oboler. He is now doing successful experimental pioneering work that will broaden the field for the best type of screen writers in the immediate future.

It is Arch Oboler, and writers of his caliber, who are exploding the myth that all screen writing must be done for the fourteen-year-old mentality, if financial success is to be achieved; that all screen pictures must contain what is called the "chase," or "cops and robbers" element. Motion picture departments and producers are moving slowly but surely away from the position that the American public is mainly composed of morons, and toward the belief that a surprisingly large percentage of this same public is intelligent and will pay cash in order to see good stories, well told and well acted. The Golden Age of the moving picture writer is just beginning to dawn. An age when the really thoughtful and creative writer, who has the initiative and enterprise to master the technique of writing for screen production, will reap ever richer and richer rewards, both in money and in personal satisfaction.

Method of Study

1. To what sense does the screen make its first and strongest appeal? What does this demand of the writer of a screen play?
2. Write a one-page synopsis of a moving picture short that can be presented with a maximum of action and a minimum of dialogue. If this is a plotted story designate the plot pattern used. If it is a story primarily planned to create an emotional effect, with-

out the use of plot, designate what effect you have in mind.

3. Give two reasons why a larger number of scenes may be used in a moving picture short than in a magazine short short.
4. Select a simple, easily recognized, universally accepted *theme* and write a one-page synopsis of a moving picture short that illustrates this theme. The short may be either light or serious.
5. Write a fully developed synopsis of a moving picture short not less than three pages nor longer than ten pages. Include as much or as little dialogue as you wish. *Tell the story pictorially* and keep it moving and unfolding through action, both subtle and obvious.

CHAPTER XXII

The One-Act Play

(THE SHORT SHORT OF THE STAGE)

THE one-act play is the short short of the legitimate stage. It bears the same relation to a full-length play as the magazine short short does to a long short story. If the student who wishes to write a one-act play will remember this one simple fact, many of his difficulties will disappear. True, the medium of presentation is very different, *but the fundamentals remain the same.* As we have seen, a short short is not a short story compressed into twelve hundred words. A one-act play is not a three or five act play condensed into one act. *A one-act play is a story that is suited to that form and could not be told so well in any other form.*

What kind of story is suited to the one-act play? Generally it is a story that presents the final action, plus the climax of a much longer story, just as is the case with a magazine short short. At the same time the story should be simple, clear-cut, with all elaborate complications and details excluded. The one-act play, whether written for presentation by high school students; Little Theater groups, or professional actors on the New York stage, should be *planned* and *written to create one single emotional and dramatic effect* on the audience. This one-pointedness of effect cannot be attained with a complicated plot, with many-sided characters, with several lines of interest, any more than it can be with a short short. Simplicity is the fundamental characteristic of the one-act play as it is of the short short.

The playing time of a one-act play should not be longer than an hour. There may be as many as three or even four scenes, but the more changes of scene the greater the danger of weakening the unity

of the play. Often the whole play is presented in one setting and without breaking the action into scenes; that is, the story is told chronologically with no time lapses that would have to be indicated by a new scene. This is the ideal way to present a one-act play, but, like all ideals, it cannot always be attained and many of our best one-act plays are broken into two, three, and even more scenes. *The story is the thing.* And if the story of your one-act play can be told better in several scenes than in one scene, by all means cast it in the larger number of scenes.

Never forget that the one-act play, to be successful, must have considerable significance and emotional value. The one-act play is for the entertainment of an audience who have gone to considerable trouble to attend the play and who have paid a substantial price for the privilege. Therefore they expect, and have a right to expect, a commensurate return for the time, effort, and money they have expended. This is not to say that your one-act play may not be a comedy. Of course it may be a comedy. But it should also be more than that. As I have said so many times before about other types of creative writing, your one-act comedy should have something to say *over and above* the actual story it tells. Such a one-act comedy is *The Twelve Pound Look*, by Sir James Barrie. This is a very amusing play. It is also a profound comment on the psychological changes made in a woman by the ability to make her own way in the world of financial independence.

Light, amusing material with little or no real significance will stand a better chance of success if cast in a magazine short short than in a one-act play. The magazine reader does not pay as much in time, money or effort, as does the person who attends a theatrical production. Therefore, if a magazine short short is very amusing indeed, the reader feels unconsciously that he has received his money's worth; though even in the magazine field the story with small or no significance or emotional effect beyond that of amusement is far more difficult to place than a story less well written but having more substance.

A stage play of whatever length appeals to the eye as well as to the ear. *Dialogue is of tremendous importance in the stage play.* In fact, because of the restrictions of action imposed by the limitations of the stage, as compared to the freedom of action offered by the motion picture screen, dialogue in a play must to a great extent carry the

story. It is also to be remembered that the theater audience, unlike the moving picture audience, enjoys clever dialogue for its own sake. Why? Because it is a highly selected audience with far more discrimination and demands than the average movie audience. Of course even the cleverest, most sparkling lines must concern themselves with the story, yet much more latitude in this matter is enjoyed by the writer for the legitimate stage than for the screen. However, such dialogue has to be very pungent, very clever indeed, and *give the illusion of being natural.* This is not easy and not to be attempted by the beginner, unless he is exceptional indeed in his natural abilities along this particular line. At first it is better to use simple, clear-cut dialogue that carries the story forward, making no obvious bid for admiration of its cleverness. Of course, as with all writing, the dialogue must be in keeping with the character.

The characters in your one-act play should be highly contrasted as to their appearance, their mannerisms and their character traits. A gay, light-minded character should have as his foil a sensible, steady, perhaps even grim character. A young person should balance a middle-aged or elderly character. The number of possible sharp contrasts between characters is innumerable and out of these contrasts will grow, naturally and easily and convincingly, comedy situations and effects, clash and struggle, dramatic scenes, interesting dialogue. Without these contrasts between characters the play will, almost without exception, be lacking in variety and consequently flat and dull. So insure your one-act play against dullness by selecting characters that differ from each other in as many ways as possible.

Characters in a stage play are not real people and should not be presented as such. The one, or at most two real character traits that they are to portray should be emphasized. Almost no person in real life is selfish, or miserly, or quarrelsome *all the time.* Each has other character traits, sometimes contradictory, that manifest themselves more or less often. But in a stage play, and more especially in a one-act play there is no time to show opposing or contradictory characteristics, any more than in the short short, and make them seem real and logical. Each character should stand for one character trait, as was done in the old morality plays of the Middle Ages, though modern audiences demand that the presentation be far more subtle. Stress and accent *bring out* the distinguishing characteristics of your

story characters, and make them visible and comprehensible to your audience. Remember that in the one-act play, as in all other creative writing, your purpose is not to reproduce life as it is, but to give *the illusion of reality,* coupled with significance, pattern, meaning—qualities that real life so often lacks, qualities that only the trained artist can see and give to his material.

Do not imagine from what is said above that characters in a one-act play cannot change. They *can* change and many fine one-act plays revolve about such a change. *But deep-seated character traits cannot be involved in this change, if you want your one-act play to be believable.* Changes can be brought about by the removal of misconceptions and prejudices, *matters of belief rather than of character.* This is where our old friend that we met in the study of the magazine short short comes to our rescue, the technique of misunderstanding, discovery and reversal. This enables the writer of the one-act play to portray through dramatic action what at first glance *appears to be* a change of character, but it is not so in reality. *It is a change of belief, followed by a change of action, or not followed by a change of action,* as the material of the play may require. It takes a miracle to bring about a *real change* of character, and few one-act plays can make good use of a miracle.

Here, as in other fields of creative writing, there are two means available of establishing the character of an actor in the story to be told. One is by direct characterization, the other is by indirect characterization.

Direct characterization is accomplished by having two actors talk about a third, acquainting the audience by their remarks with the characteristics of this third actor who may or may not be on the stage at the time.

Indirect characterization is accomplished by having the actor *himself show his character traits by his acts* or *by what he says. This way is by far the better way,* generally speaking, as *it permits the audience to see for themselves,* make up their own minds, about the actor in question. But the first method is sometimes useful in *preparing the audience* for an actor who has not yet appeared, and later in the play, for pointing out the significance, so far as character is concerned, of what has been said and done in full view of the audience. In one-act plays with a psychological basis, direct characterization is more com-

monly used than in one-act plays that deal with simpler situations and less complicated characters. Direct characterization is useful when subtle characters must be explained to the audience, their characteristics made plain; characteristics that it would be difficult, if not impossible to make clear through speech and action of the character himself within the limited time-confines of a one-act play.

The keynote of each character should be struck at once upon his first entrance, or if other characters strike that keynote in dialogue, *before* his first entrance. This keynote should tell the audience what kind of person this character is and what emotion the writer of the play expects the audience to feel toward him. There should never be a moment's confusion on these points.

The minor characters in a one-act play should never be allowed to take the center of the stage, never outshine or overbalance a major character. On the other hand, they should not be mere automata, lay figures; instead they must be interesting personalities in their own right. As with the magazine short short, this is easily accomplished by judicious individualization with little, if any, actual portrayal of character traits. Individualized minor characters can add greatly to the sustained interest of a one-act play.

The Beginning, Body and End of the one-act play closely parallel in their functions the Beginning, Body and End of the magazine short short. The Beginning of a one-act play may be swift in tempo, plunging the audience at once into the action of the piece as it is necessary to do in the radio dramatic spot; or it may begin more slowly, by presenting a situation out of which the story itself develops. If the latter procedure is used, great care must be taken to make the opening interesting. This is done in many ways, among them being the use of highly contrasted characters in clash or opposition to each other, clever dialogue, the unfolding of an intrinsically interesting situation, the foreshadowing of trouble, and so on. The type of material and the audience toward which you are slanting that material will influence you in your choice of what kind of Beginning you think will be the most effective. In any case, you will introduce all your main characters in the Beginning and present at once the story situation of your play.

In the Body of the one-act play this story situation will be developed to a climax by dialogue and action. It is here, in the Body, that

inconsistencies of character and lack of convincing motivation are likely to slip in, and careful watch should be kept that they do not occur. The best insurance against their not occurring is to *create your characters fully in your own mind* before starting to write your play. If you do this, you will *know* what their characteristics and motives are, and *how they will manifest themselves* at all times and under all circumstances.

The End should be brief and swiftly follow the climax. The last speech or speeches of a one-act play are as important and should have the same qualities as the last paragraph or last line of a magazine short short. In them should be summed up, pungently and graphically, the central idea of the play, its significance. This isn't easy to do. Time and ingenuity and brain-work of the first order are often necessary to get the last few lines of a one-act play to say all they must say if the audience is to be left with a feeling of satisfaction, the feeling that their time has been well spent in attending the play.

Now let us look at some devices that are especially useful in a one-act play: In many cases a considerable body of knowledge about what has happened before the play actually began must be given the audience. This presents a problem to the untrained playwright and he usually solves it—to his own liking but to the liking of no one else—by long speeches that are little more than plain exposition, plain statements of facts. This method is unbelievably dull and boring. It is to be avoided at all costs.

One way of avoiding this is by swift, sprightly dialogue made up, for the most part, of questions and answers, coupled with a play of emotions felt by one or both or all the characters involved in this dialogue. These emotions may be curiosity, consternation, anger, surprise, and so on. Without emotion, such dialogue cannot be expected to entertain the audience.

Another device is to use clash between the characters employed to convey such necessary information to the audience. Perhaps one character does not wish to tell what he knows, but is forced to do so by the other. Or each may blame the other for what has happened in the past and while they quarrel over this they reveal to the audience the *facts* the audience must know to follow the further action of the play and understand all its implications.

Perhaps past action has got one character into serious trouble and circumstances force him to reveal such past action to an unsympathetic character. Incidentally a sympathetic character does not, generally speaking, furnish the necessary opposition or contrast to secure audience interest.

This revelation of facts that precede the opening of the play does not always come at the Beginning. Frequently it is delayed until the Body, though it should be given as early in the Body as possible. Here facts may be given in a connected narrative, provided the narrative is highly dramatic and cast in an interesting form. By this time the audience has become acquainted with the characters and is, we take it for granted, interested in them. Consequently when one of the characters says:

> "All this trouble is the result of what happened last year when I spent a week in Tampa. Let me tell you about it. You will see then that there is nothing left for me but suicide. I was sitting on the beach one day. . . ."

With this beginning the audience will listen with rapt interest to an exposition that may continue for several minutes. Though this device should be handled with great care and discretion in the Body, it can be very useful in presenting necessary information in an interesting way.

If your one-act play ends in a surprise, as many one-act plays do, remember that a surprise, to have the highest degree of effectiveness, *must be prepared for,* usually from the very Beginning. Not openly or obviously, of course, but by subtle plants and foreshadowings as in the magazine short short. The Surprise Ending that pleases the audience most is the one that, while unexpected, is a natural, *inevitable outgrowth* and *result* of the action of the play.

A simple example of this is the surprise shooting of a villain at the climax of the play. Let us say that a timid, shrinking, gentle person does the shooting. Hence, the act is startlingly unexpected. But the gun has been planted, perhaps several times. The audience has seen the villain handle it, heard him say he keeps it loaded for emergencies, watched him hang it on the wall above the desk in his study. There-

fore, when at the crucial moment the timid person snatches the gun and shoots the villain, the audience is surprised but not bewildered, as would have been the case had the timid person suddenly produced a gun from a pocket or a drawer of the desk where the audience had no previous knowledge that a gun was kept.

Significant pay-off lines are often *planted* in the Beginning, prepared for long before they are used. This preparation makes it possible for the audience to grasp without a moment's hesitation all their implications regarding the significance of the action of the play.

There is a very large market for one-act plays suitable to production by amateur groups, such as church societies, high schools, college dramatic societies and Little Theater groups. The returns from an outright sale to a publishing house is small. Royalties sometimes bring in very respectable sums to authors, provided the play becomes popular. Such one-act plays have a long life and bring in a steady, if modest income for many years.

The market for a high class one-act play to be produced by professionals on the legitimate stage is practically non-existent for the unknown, free-lance writer. Only a few such plays are produced and they are almost without exception written by a well-known and established fiction writer or playwright. The beginning or unknown writer will do better first to turn his dramatic story ideas that are suited to a first-class one-act play into a magazine short short, or even a radio dramatic spot. Why? Because the chances of his selling it in these two forms are so much greater than in the form of a one-act play for, shall we say, the New York stage.

Method of Study

1. List two major characters and three minor characters that might appear in the same one-act play. After the name of each write a brief description and characterization showing that the actors are in strong contrast to each other.
2. Write a one-page synopsis of a one-act play that is built around misunderstanding, discovery and reversal. Write out the two final speeches of the play in full.
3. Write one page of the beginning of a one-act play that plunges the audience immediately into swift, staccato action.

4. Write one page of the beginning of a one-act play with interesting dialogue that prepares the audience for the beginning of action that carries the story forward.
5. Write a complete one-act play, slanting it toward any one of the four fields mentioned; church societies, high school drama classes, Little Theater groups or the legitimate stage.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Ten-Minute Radio Drama

(THE SHORT SHORT OF RADIO)

THE radio short is known as the ten-minute sketch, or the dramatic spot. It is always a part of a longer show extending over a half-hour period or an hour period. *It is a complete story in itself,* having the general characteristics of a magazine short short. The ways in which it differs from the magazine short short are those made necessary by the radio medium. To that end a careful, even exhaustive study of the limitations and opportunities of radio presentation should precede any attempt to write a radio short.

Few will dispute that the mechanics of radio broadcasting impose a more rigid technique on the creative writer who is ambitious to write for radio than any of the other forms of presentation we have considered in this book—the magazine short short, the moving picture short and the one-act play of the legitimate stage. This is not to say that it is more difficult to write for radio than for the other fields of dramatic presentation, for that would not be true. It only means that *in addition to a thorough knowledge of magazine technique* the writer must have at his finger tips the thousand and one details of radio broadcasting that he must take into consideration as he plans and writes his radio play. It is not too difficult to acquire this specific knowledge. Ways of doing so will be suggested at the end of this chapter.

Radio is still in its infancy. It has no long background of tradition such as is possessed by fiction writing and by the stage play. Even the youthful art of moving pictures is many years older than the art of radio. Nor does the writing of acceptable synopses for moving pic-

tures require anything like the detailed knowledge of how motion pictures are made as writing for radio requires the detailed knowledge of how radio shows are produced, and broadcast. The two media are completely different in their demands on the creative writer.

No one knows very much about radio yet. It is still in the experimental stage. Horizons are constantly being widened, new effects achieved. Yet those inside the radio industry have gone a long way and established many boundaries that are true for the present and may stand for a long time to come. It is those boundaries that the writer who wishes to turn his talents to writing for radio should learn.

First, let us examine radio *as a means of dramatic entertainment.* This is the only angle that interests us here. *Radio appeals to the ear and to the ear alone.* Through the ear the writer aims to appeal to the imagination of the listener to create the scenes, the characters, the action, and the emotions of the story.

The radio writer has five tools: *Speech, music, musical effects, sound, sound effects.* With these, *and nothing else,* he creates his story. If at first thought these seem meager tools, recall the moving, colorful, emotional and appealing radio plays you have heard, and realize what can be done with speech, music and sound by talented writers skilled in their use. There is no reason why you, too, cannot create worth-while effects by these same apparently limited means. It is a problem, like anything else, and can be solved with talent, training, ingenuity and perseverance.

Of the five tools, speech is by far the most important. Unlike the legitimate theater and the screen, in radio there must never be a silence of more than a very few seconds. Some form of sound is the only way you have of holding listener interest and listener attention. The moment there is an absence of sound the listener's attention wanders. If the silence continues very long, the illusion of the play is entirely destroyed, because the listener comes out of the dream world you have induced him to create, the dream world of his story, and yours, and returns to the everyday life of the present and his immediate surroundings.

For this reason, among others, speech (mainly dialogue) plays a very large part in a radio play, and its particular requirements should be carefully studied. For example, *in writing radio dialogue, the radio actors frequently should be addressed by name* by other actors, in

order to keep them identified for the listener. *Speeches should be very short,* rarely longer than a line or two at most, in order to give variety and speed the tempo. Because of the brief time allowed for any play on the radio, and especially for the radio short, *every word must perform many functions,* among them being that of moving the story along, characterizing the speaker, helping to set the scene, characterizing other actors, giving the listener information about what happened before the story began, expressing emotion, and so on. In the moving picture, action carries the heavy load of telling the story. *In radio, dialogue is the burden bearer.* Of course, music and sound effects are of tremendous help when their radio possibilities are understood and they are used with skill.

Dialogue is managed so that it keeps every actor on the stage "alive" in the scene until he is no longer needed and leaves that scene. This is done by distributing the speeches at more or less regularly spaced intervals among the actors. If an actor does not speak for a long time, it is said that he "dies out" of the scene. That is, the listener forgets he is there and when, after a long time, he suddenly speaks, the listener experiences a slight shock of surprise that tends to break the play's illusion. So always remember to keep your actors "alive" in any scene until their usefulness for that scene is over. Then get them off the stage in a way that lets the listener know they are leaving.

It is a dangerous procedure to allow a radio actor to talk to himself. Talking to oneself is a silly procedure at best, and on the radio it is deadly. True, in some of the experimental dramas and in the "quality" radio shorts, it is done with very good effect,[1] but we are talking now about the usual commercial radio short that there is a reasonable chance you will write without too much struggle and sell without too much effort. The special fields of radio you will be wise to leave until you have mastered the basic technique of radio.

The radio audience is different from any other audience on earth, and you will not be able to write for it until you understand some of its characteristics. To begin with, it is *not one audience.* It is made up of small units, family groups of from two to five people, and of in-

[1] An outstanding illustration is MAN WITH A GUN, by Charles Vanda and Russ Johnston, in *Columbia Workshop Plays,* edited by Douglas Coulter, published by Whittlesey House.

dividuals *who are alone.* There is, naturally, no group psychology here. Nor are you writing for people who have probably dressed themselves for the occasion, made the effort to get to a specific place, bought a ticket of admission, and are sitting quietly in a darkening theater with no other thought on their minds than the expectation of being entertained. Very different conditions exist in the radio audience and a very different mental attitude prevails.

Your radio play, we can say, comes into a living-room of a home practically uninvited. The listener or listeners are surrounded by distractions. A tempting magazine lies close at hand, or a book. Members of the family move about, talk. The telephone rings. They notice the hole burnt in the upholstery of the davenport, the picture that hangs crookedly on the wall. There are yells in the street, the sound of a car backfiring. They smell rubber burning and wonder anxiously about it. And so on and so on. We all know the distractions that keep us from listening attentively to the radio even when a play is gripping and we *want* to listen. If there is a dead spot in the play and our interest sags we can, with little or no effort, turn the radio off, or start a conversation with someone, or pick up that magazine, or decide to go down to the neighborhood movie.

No writer battles for interest against so many odds as the writer for radio. It is only by understanding these odds and knowing how to overcome them that radio writers succeed.

The answer is that listener interest *must be secured by the first line of a radio play* and that interest must be steadily built up without an instant's pause until the climax is reached and the play is finished. It is easier to do this in a radio short than in a radio play that runs approximately twenty-seven minutes or fifty-five minutes actual playing time. *Interest is secured and held by progressive action indicated by speech, sound effects and music.*

It is sometimes said that the writer of drama for radio should think of himself as writing for blind people. This would be fine if it were true, but unfortunately for the radio dramatist, it is not true. Most persons in the radio audience are not blind. Their attention is distracted by their seeing everything that goes on about them, by details of their surroundings, every moment they are listening. They are blind only so far as the radio drama itself is concerned. They must build it entirely in their own minds by means of their own imagina-

tions. There is no use saying in your radio play, as part of your stage directions, "John looks at Hal and nods vehemently." The listener can't *see* a nod. The nod, if necessary or helpful to the story, must be indicated by dialogue, something like this:

> Hal: Do stop nodding at me like that, John. You'll jerk your head off if you're not careful.

When indicating music to be used, the writer very rarely gives the name of a specific musical composition, unless it is one that is universally known and recognized, such as *Here Comes the Bride.* Usually, only the type or mood of the music wanted is indicated. Perhaps something like this:

(*MUSIC: LIGHT, GAY, FAIRY-LIKE.*) Or (*MUSIC: SLOW, MOURNFUL*). This enables the producer to select suitable music from the music library of the studio.

Radio sound effects and how to use them is a very large subject. The general rule is to *use as few sound effects as possible* and unless the sound is easily and certainly recognizable, such as the ringing of a telephone bell or the slamming of a door, the sound is identified in the dialogue just before it is heard. For example, over the radio, the sound of bacon frying, rain, and some types of wind sound almost exactly alike. Consequently a radio actor would say, *just before the sound is heard,* "I do believe it is starting to rain," or "At last the bacon is starting to fry," or "I'm glad the wind is beginning to blow." The listener must never have even a second's doubt as to what a sound really is.

Background sounds, such as the sound of an automobile, or of waves breaking on a beach, that are part of a setting, are heard in the beginning of a scene, then faded out so they will not distract the listener's attention from the dialogue, then faded in again at the very end of the scene. This gives a truer effect than if the sound were continued throughout the scene, because in real-life background sounds, unless they are very loud and distracting, fade from the consciousness as interest centers on what is happening, *to return to the conscious attention only when that interest attention is released.*

In radio, sound is used to help the reader imagine action and to give impressionistic effects. In no other medium can this be done nearly

so effectively. Of course preparation must be made for this by dialogue. For example, let us say there has been a bit of excited dialogue indicating that two automobiles are about to crash. Then the *sound* of the crash is heard. That sound helps the listener to create a far clearer picture of what happened, and far more quickly, than could be done with dialogue alone, no matter how vivid and how pictorial. The same is true of far less important sounds, such as the sound of a breaking dish, the sound of water running in a bathtub, the sound of someone scratching a match. *But remember to identify these sounds first in the dialogue.*

The use of sound to give *impressionistic effects* is just beginning to be developed in radio, though many excellent effects have already been achieved. The potentialities are limitless and constantly expanding as radio writers awaken to the possibilities of this device and radio listeners become educated to accept and make the most of its symbolism, in their imaginative and creative mental activities.

One of the simplest, commonest, and at the same time most effective of these impressionistic sound effects is the ticking of a metronome back of dialogue, or in a pause in dialogue where it indicates the passing of time *by sound*. Time is often very important in a radio short, just as it is in other forms of creative writing. When writing a story you can have your character look at his watch, or at a clock, at brief intervals, thus keeping the idea of the passage of time before the reader. This is true of a stage play. But in your radio your character cannot look at his watch, or if he does it means nothing to the *listener*. Of course he can *say* so much time his elapsed, that the crucial moment draws near, but that takes time and every second is precious in the radio short. The monotonous ticking of a metronome creates an effect of time passing, while dialogue and action proceed, *and so helps to build suspense*. The ticking of a metronome is only one of the countless sound effects now used to create impressionistic effects. Listen attentively to your radio and you will hear many more. As you *read* magazine stories for technique, so, too, you *listen* to radio for the same purpose.

Musical instruments are sometimes used to create impressionistic sound effects. And when this is noted in the script, it is set up in the form of a sound effect and not in the form of a musical direction. A few common impressionistic sound effects for which musical instru-

ments are used are as follows: A sustained, high, thin note on a violin or flute indicating intense pain. A swift, smooth ascending tone indicating the rising of an airplane, a high jump, and so on, depending on the dialogue that precedes it. A series of notes from a saxophone or tuba indicating derision, or contempt. As you readily see, these are *musical sound effects,* not music.

Now to return to the specific technique of the radio short. These generally appear on evening programs, when the air time costs a great deal of money. Consequently a radio short has to be *good.* The actors who play the lead parts in radio shorts are almost always stars of the first magnitude and the supporting players are the best that can be secured. Radio shorts, or dramatic spots, are part of a longer program running for thirty minutes or one hour. There are very few full hour shows on the air at the present time and it seems likely that there will be fewer as time goes on because of the almost prohibitive cost of putting on a show of this length.

Plan your radio short so that it requires *as few characters as possible.* This is to keep the cost down and to avoid confusing the listeners, as may happen if there are more than two or three main characters and the same number of supporting players.

Your radio short should have real substance and deep emotional values, even though it is presented with humor and light touches. Sponsors and producers hesitate to spend the large sums required to air a radio short unless it is fundamentally significant, says something over and above the actual story, or arouses deep emotions in the listener. Tragedy is to be avoided, though pathos may be employed to excellent advantage. You have learned the basic way to do this in your study of emotion in the magazine short short. The same rules are applicable to radio.

Radio shorts are, for the most part, written to fit a specific program and as a vehicle for a specific star. For example, a dramatic spot that would be right for the program of one comedian would not be right for the program of another comedian. For instance, a short written for Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy wouldn't do for Jack Benny and Rochester. The fitness of a dramatic spot to the program for which it is intended should be your first consideration. It is practically useless to write a radio short first and then look around for a program that might possibly use it.

Most radio shorts that you hear on the air are written by staff writers working under contract, though a few programs consider the work of free-lance writers. A careful study should be made of the personality of the star, the style of the program, the type of dramatic spots used, the supporting actors already working on the program, and so on, before writing a short for that program. If you do this, your chances of making a sale will be enormously increased.

The radio short is not submitted in the form of a summary or synopsis, as is the case in moving pictures. The play must be not only complete in every way, but set up in exact accordance with the form that the radio players themselves use in broadcasting the play. If your short deviates from this form in any way it will be looked upon coldly as the work of a novice, one who has not taken the trouble to learn the technique of radio, and small attention will be given to it. It will have to be truly a work of outstanding genius to get anywhere at all. So don't handicap yourself. *Be sure your short script looks like a script.* A sample page of radio script will be found in the Appendix at the end of this book.

It is not possible to give even a close approximation of the word-length of a radio short designed for a playing time of about ten minutes. *The number of words required depends on whether the play has a fast tempo or a slow tempo* and whether the actors speak slowly or briskly and how much time is devoted to music and sound effects. However, generally speaking, a radio short contains close to fifteen hundred words. Ordinary dialogue runs about one hundred fifty words a minute. *It should be remembered that there are wide variations* due to conditions mentioned above. *Timing is so important in radio that it influences everything that is broadcast.* Consequently, you should time your radio short very carefully by reading it aloud at about the pace you think it should proceed, and allow time for music and sound effects that you have called for on the script.

One way to get started in radio is to secure a job in the industry—any job at all. Then you will be able to learn at first hand the mechanics of broadcasting, which are the basis of writing for broadcasting. You will also be on the inside, where you can submit your work directly to the producer of a program or series of programs, and through him to the sponsor and the star, all of whom pass on a radio short before it is bought. If you can't work in a radio station, then

you will probably get best results by securing the services of an agent to market your output. You can learn the mechanics of broadcasting in a reputable, well-equipped school, and also the many details of the technique of writing for radio, details that, because of limited space, have been lightly touched upon here, and many that have not been mentioned at all.

You can supplement knowledge gained in the ways mentioned above by *listening analytically* to dramatic radio programs or programs having a dramatic spot. Also by attending, if possible, dramatic broadcasts in radio broadcasting studios, small or large, and *seeing how* radio plays are broadcast. What actually takes place on the stage of a broadcasting studio bears small resemblance indeed to the radio drama that the listener creates from what goes on there. It is this wide gap that the radio writer learns to bridge with the five tools of speech, sound, sound effects, music and musical effects.

Method of Study

1. Name the five tools of the radio writer. Which one is most important?
2. Name three differences between a moving picture audience and a radio audience that the writer for each must take into account.
3. Write a synopsis of a radio short suited to the program of a specific comedy star, with that star taking the main role.
4. Write a synopsis of a radio short suited to a musical program.
5. Write and cast in final form for submission a radio short that is a serious drama and tells a complete story that has significance and emotional values.

Let Us Take Counsel Together

WE HAVE come a long way in this book . . . covered a great deal of ground. The time has come for you, the writer, to take stock of what you have learned and *make definite plans* for the future. You probably feel that you have practical and workable ideas how to go about planning and writing short shorts. You are confident that experience and practice will give you greater skill and assurance than is yours at the moment. What, then, is the question uppermost in your mind?

Probably it goes something like this, though you may have phrased it differently: As a writer, what are my chances for success in the short short field?

It is impossible for me to answer that question, finally and definitely, because there is for me, and must always be, an unknown factor. That unknown factor is YOU. But this factor is not unknown to you. Therefore, by using dependable weights and balances, and a correct yardstick, you should be able to arrive at a solution of the problem sufficiently accurate for all practical purposes.

I shall try to give you the necessary weights and balances, and a proper yardstick, so that you may determine for yourself what your chances are:

First, let us take a quick look at the vast and almost infinitely varied demand for short shorts. The main branches are given below. Please remember that on close examination each branch will be found to have several subdivisions:

1. Newspaper syndicates.
2. Religious publications, with widely varying age-brackets, requirements, taboos, literary standards and rates of pay.

a. Catholic publications
b. Protestant publications, sectarian and non-sectarian.
3. Farm and regional magazines.
4. Women's magazines, second-class.
5. Women's magazines, first-class.
6. Top, nationally-distributed general-interest magazines.
7. Literary magazines.

All the above markets are open to the unknown writer who can produce what the editors of the different publications want. These men and women unanimously declare that not enough short shorts of the caliber they are looking for come to their desks. Here, *the unknown writer who sends in a story suited to the desires and needs of the specific magazine* is on the same footing as the big-name writer.

The scope and variety of the short short markets is so great that practically any writer who possesses even the smallest writing talent and *will learn to use it intelligently,* can find a place for his work. But no writer can hope to succeed in any short short market without hard work, directed effort, and the exercise of everyday common sense. Herein lies the unknown factor spoken of above. There is undoubtedly a market waiting for every degree of writing talent, of writing skill, of capacity for expression. But the work must not be done ignorantly, haphazardly or carelessly. Each story must be conceived, planned, and written to achieve a predetermined effect and with a particular magazine, or group of magazines in mind. Otherwise, if the writer doesn't slant his material he is shooting in the dark at a target, the location of which he does not know.

Look over the list of the main subdivisions in the short short field. If you cannot immediately decide which one you are best fitted to try first, settle on two, or even three. Then get all the magazines you can —several numbers of each—and *study them from every angle.* When this is done, you will probably find you have decided what one you will first write for. But if you still cannot make up your mind, try writing for all three. This should settle the matter, leaving no doubt in your mind.

Of course you may be so versatile that you can turn quickly from writing one type of short short to writing another and very different type. But the ability to do this is rare. Usually, the writer who tries this only becomes confused in his thinking and fails to write any type

well. I do not recommend such a course to the beginning writer, except for experimental purposes while trying to discover the type of writing for which he is best suited.

Looking over the short short field, it is apparent that the known factors that will affect your chances for success are all in your favor. These factors are: the large and ever-growing demand for short shorts; the number of publications, also increasing, that publish short shorts; the extremely wide range of requirements to be found in the short short field; the fact that the market, from bottom to top, is open to beginners; and the high rates paid for acceptable stories by both second-class and top magazines.

The unknown factor, let me again remind you, is YOU. But that factor *can* be known *to you,* through self-examination and self-evaluation; and it is, if you determine to make it so, under your control. I believe we are safe in assuming that you have some talent, since it is hardly likely you would have read this book if it were not so. However small, however great that talent may be, *it can and must be disciplined and developed and channeled by means of knowledge, practice* and *intelligently directed effort,* before anything more than a flash-in-the-pan success can be achieved.

Well, what about it, Mr. (Mrs. or Miss) X . . . you, the unknown factor in the problem? Take stock of yourself and the solution will appear, clear and unmistakable. If the answer is what I think it is, go ahead . . . and the best of luck.

Though you won't need much luck, for the chances will *all be in your favor.*

APPENDIX

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Foreword to the Appendix

THESE eleven short shorts, which make up the appendix of this book, are not offered to the reader and student-writer as perfect pieces of fiction with which no one can find any fault whatsoever. Such a paragon of a story has probably never been written. However, these stories have been selected with great care from literally hundreds of stories, as clear and, I hope, helpful *illustrations of the various techniques that enter into the writing of successful short shorts.*

A thoughtful study of these stories and the analysis that follows each one, should help you, the serious student-writer, to analyze published stories in a way that will be of practical assistance in creating your own original stories. Also, this study should help you to analyze your own original stories, to see them objectively, check them for weaknesses you might otherwise never be able to discern. Every writer, professional as well as non-professional, knows only too well how difficult, even impossible, it is to discover the flaws in his own work. A comprehensive, sound system of analysis will help you to change this impossibility to something not too difficult to accomplish. A practical system such as this is worth dollars and cents to the aspiring writer, *provided he will use it sincerely and thoughtfully and thoroughly.*

It will not work by itself. You, the writer, must learn to use it, as you learn to use any tool: by practice and thought and hard, concentrated work.

Dozens of *original* stories may be built up from the statements of the story essentials placed at the end of each analysis. You have only to take this *sound skeleton idea* and clothe it with the living, breathing flesh and blood of *your own* imagination, experience,

memories and feeling about life to have a story *that no one on earth except you* could possibly have written; in other words, a truly original story.

All that any writer has to sell that is new and different is *himself*. There are no new plots, and probably no new situations. All that can be new and original about any story is *the way* you, *the writer, see it*, and *the way you tell it*. So don't try to write imitations of stories. Write stories from your own experience, your own mind, your own heart.

You can learn *how* to write what you have to say by studying successful stories written by other people. *What you yourself say must spring from what you are, what you believe and what you feel.*

Sucker Trick

BY

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

(Published in the *American Magazine*, August 1939. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, Copyright 1939 and by Brandt and Brandt, agents for the author, Frank Richardson Pierce.)

As Brock flew straight toward the aurora borealis, he realized that he probably would have to kill Old Man McDowell, factor at Arrowhead Post. Old, trusted employees have silly ideas about protecting an employer's property. McDowell's forty-year record was perfect. He had handled millions in gold and fur without loss.

Well, a burst from the machine gun would turn the trick. Brock set the plane down on the ice in front of the log trading post, then jumped out, weapon in hand. It was cold—fifty below—and everyone was inside.

Brock stopped before entering the building and tossed three rifles into a snowdrift. He had heard that trappers carelessly left their rifles leaning against the outside wall. A sucker trick, he thought. It left them helpless against an armed man.

Brock opened the door and stepped quickly inside. The air was steamy from woolens drying above the oil drum heater and it carried the smoky odor of baled furs and tobacco burned in pipes.

McDowell and the three trappers stared at the machine gun briefly, then raised their hands. "I want the gold and furs," Brock said. "Be smart, and do as you're told."

"Aye, I'll be smart," Old Man McDowell meekly agreed. So he was yellow, after all. Brock smiled contemptuously, and the factor began piling bales of fur and moosehide pokes stiff with gold on the worn counter. The three trappers continued to stare at the machine gun. Moisture was gathering on the weapon—as beads gather on an ice-filled glass on a sultry day.

"It's all here," Old Man McDowell said presently, "every ounce and every pelt."

The sable smuggled in from Russia would bring a fortune in itself. Then there was the gold. "The four of you pick it up and march out to the plane," Brock ordered. "Any funny business and I'll cut you down."

The men obeyed, but Brock noticed the trappers looked for their rifles as they stepped into the moonlit night. "Leaving them outside was a sucker trick," he taunted, "and let this be a lesson to you."

No man answered. They trudged toward the plane, but half way there Old Man McDowell turned suddenly and rushed Brock. Brock squeezed the trigger and waited for the recoil. There was no response. He struck the weapon and tried again. It was jammed. He tried to use it as a club, but Old Man McDowell jumped into the air and struck him in the stomach with both feet. Sickness, agony, drained Brock's strength. His legs buckled and he fell. The others pinned him down.

"Aye," Old Man McDowell panted, "a sucker trick—bringing a cold weapon into a steamy room where it gathers moisture. Didn't you know that the mechanism would freeze when you took it into the cold?"

Analysis of "Sucker Trick'

Length: 454 words—a vignette.
Plot (or story design): Biter-Bit.
Theme: Evil carries within itself the seeds of its own defeat.
Viewpoint: Main character, third person.
Type: Vignette.
Main Character (Actor A): Brock. Since this is a Biter-Bit story, he is the villain.
Number of Characters: Two—that function in the plot. There are also three unnamed background characters.
Story in One Sentence: Brock plans to steal the gold and furs at Arrowhead Post, but fails because his machine gun collects moisture in the warm room, and the mechanism freezes when Brock goes outside.
Beginning: The first, second, third and fourth paragraphs constitute the Beginning. *Who, where, why* and *what* are all established here, the cold is planted, and the reader is in possession of all plot factors. These include the approximate age of Old Man McDowell—a supposed factor for Brock's success; the old man's honesty—a factor against Brock's success; characterization of Brock—he will kill without remorse, if necessary to carry out his plan; and details of setting. Other plants are: the fact that experienced men leave their guns outside, that Brock believes the men will be helpless against him because he is armed, and that the air in the room is steamy. *Note:* This is a good deal to do in one hundred and sixty-one words, which is the length of this Beginning, approximately one-third the length of the whole story.
Body: The Body begins with Paragraph 5, Old Man McDowell, men-

tioned in the Beginning, is here introduced in person, and the story begins to develop progressively. The Body ends with the words, "They trudged toward the plane . . ." This is the point of highest tension, the Black Moment when it seems certain that Brock will succeed. Then comes the swift, dramatic action that changes the whole situation.

End: The End begins with the words, ". . . but half way there Old Man McDowell turned suddenly and rushed Brock," and ends with the words, "The others pinned him down." This is actually the end of the story, since at this point Brock is defeated in his purpose, but the story is not complete. A Sequel is necessary to explain *how* this *denouement* was brought about.

Sequel: The Sequel is the final paragraph, in which the reason for the success of Old Man McDowell's attack is revealed. Or, in other words, how the Biter (Brock) was Bit by the very forces he himself set in motion to achieve his own nefarious end.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The plot itself, which readers like because it shows a villain defeating himself.
2. The frequent use of the title in the Beginning, and the Body and the Sequel, with different meanings. *This is a strong unifying force.* "Sucker trick" is used four times in this story, and with a different significance in the End from that in the Beginning. Readers and editors like this device.
3. Its brevity. This is the shortest fully plotted story that has come to my attention in the many years that I have been reading short stories analytically. The story has everything that a fully rounded out Biter-Bit story should have: Brock and Old Man McDowell are properly characterized for their respective roles: Brock, without conscience, a thief and killer; Old Man McDowell, rigidly honest, old, apparently helpless to defend himself. The cold, a real factor in the plot, is planted four times in the beginning . . . three times indirectly and once directly, the actual degrees of temperature being stated.
4. Fast, decisive action.
5. Short time lapse. The over-all time consumed in the story action might easily be less than ten minutes.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character, a villain, proposes to harm a good, apparently defenseless minor character. The villain brings about his own defeat by his over-confidence and ignorance of conditions in the environment of his potential victim.

The Girl at the Filling Station

BY

BEN HUR LAMPMAN

(Published first in the Portland *Oregonian* as a signed column, and later in the *Atlantic Monthly* of June 1944. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by the author, Ben Hur Lampman.)

When her father died and left her no more than the filling station, a few debts—not too many—and the three cottages, the simplest thing to do, seemed like, was to stay there and keep right on selling gas and oil, checking air, and washing windshields. For Rosy, the fat girl, as folks called her, was all alone and running the filling station was the only work she knew. She lived in one of the cottages and was lonely for Pa—perhaps a little lonelier than when he was there—and the other two cottages were rented over-night once in a while. It wasn't a good place for a filling station, but such as it was, there was a lean living in it. And Rosy had lived there as long as she could remember.

To all appearances Rosy was contented with her life at the filling station, but fatness is often mistaken for placidity and how were any of the customers to know that in her heart Rosy was slender and lovely, and a far, glad traveler? Not that she was without loveliness, were one to look twice—for the filling station girl's eyes were gray as mist on a frog pond, and her round cheeks had the ineffable bloom which sometimes is given to the cheeks of fat girls. Indeed, had one looked at her twice one must have agreed that her mother had named her well, but nobody ever looked twice at Rosy in her greasy brown jumper, with her blond bob every which way.

"How much will it take?"

"Fill her up."

"Check the oil?"

"No."

There wasn't anybody who looked twice at Rosy, except to observe that she plumped out her brown jumper quite ludicrously. How were they to guess that Rosy had been to Palm Beach—in her heart—and that she was lovely—in her heart again?

Florida. Maine. California. New Hampshire. Wyoming. Virginia. North Carolina. Tennessee. Quite all the states on the license plates—

and sometimes a foreign country, like Canada. In the summer there were almost as many out-of-state license plates as there were those of her own state. The cars swung or lurched out on to the pavement again and were away on their travels. And Rosy had never been out of the county. A fat girl in a brown, greasy jumper, with a blond tousled bob, standing there looking off down the road. In a little while another car would drive in. It might be from Texas—from Texas, down on the Rio Grande.

"How many, mister?"

The gravel spurted again and the car from Texas was gone.

More dearly than you have ever watched the wild geese passing over, Rosy watched the cars going by. More than ever you have wondered what might be beyond the blue hills, Rosy wondered to what manner of places the strange cars were bound—for she was going on twenty-three, and dieting didn't seem to ever help, and she hadn't been out of the county in her whole life. Rosy tended the wants of the road, and the road went away and she didn't know whither, and there were times when behind the roseate mask of her so-rounded cheeks and the still, pond-gray of her eyes, beneath the tousled blond bob, the real Rosy felt as though she just couldn't stand it a single day longer.

It was three years since Rosy's father had taken the cold that went into pneumonia—and Rosy was yet at the filling station, and still she hadn't been out of the county. Sometimes of nights when she had closed the station and gone to bed in the third cottage, where she had always lived, fat Rosy cried on her pillow until she was dreaming. There wasn't anybody else there to see her, but when Rosy was dreaming, she smiled, and the long-lashed, full face on the pillow, with the red parted lips and the dream on it, would have been rather lovely to see. At five in the morning, the alarm clock roused Rosy, and she made the coffee. The first of the millhands would be out there honking for gas. For Rosy, who hadn't been out of the county in her whole life.

Toward twilight one day, and the day hadn't seemed any different, the rattletrap car from Texas drew up, and she filled its tank. The car's driver was about Rosy's age, and lean and leathern as she was plump and roseate, and brown as she was fair. Rosy filled the old car's tank, and counted the change into his hand, and he might have gone on into town, where there was a real auto camp, if he hadn't have happened to look twice at Rosy. And nobody ever had done that before, at least not in that way. But he saw that her mother had named her well, and he marked the mist-gray of her eyes, the softness of her blown blond bob, and he fell to whistling softly as he jingled the change in his hand.

"You say you've got a cottage for rent for the night?" he asked her.

"I never said I had," answered Rosy, "but I've got one."

He paid the cash in advance.

That night, when Rosy had closed the filling station and padlocked the

pump, the two of them walked together as far as the river bridge. There was a full moon and the moon swam on the water. Nobody had ever walked with Rosy to the river bridge, not ever before. She didn't know whether to let him hold her plump hand or refuse it—but they walked back swinging hands under the moon, and in spite of her work at the filling station Rosy's hand was nigh as soft as a child's. He didn't try to kiss her when they said goodnight, but Rosy didn't really expect him to. She might be a slender, gay girl in her heart—ah, she knew that she was—but he couldn't know it. Rosy was wrong about that.

She rapped on the door of his cottage when she got up at five the next morning, for he had told her he wanted to make an early start, and they had coffee together. He got into his rickety old car and started the motor—and fat Rosy stood there with one foot on the running board hungrily looking her last at him, the only one of them all who had ever looked twice. And this young fellow from Texas, he saw the soft gray of her eyes again, and their eyes caught and held—and two round fat tears welled warmly from Rosy's mist-gray eyes and rolled slowly down her fat cheeks.

"Rosy!" he said.

"What?" gulped Rosy.

"Rosy," he said, "climb in!"

Rosy gasped as she realized what he had said, but she knew her moment. "Wh—wh—where are we going?" stammered she.

"We're a-going to Texas," he said, "that's where we're a-going!"

Mister, the fat girl of the filling station, this Rosy, she was as pretty as a rose.

How they managed it doesn't matter a great deal—she just about gave the filling station away, as she would have, but they went to Texas, all right. To Texas, and heaven knows where else. For sometimes it is that way with them—you have to look at them twice.

Analysis of "The Girl at the Filling Station"

Length: Approximately 1000 words.

Plot (or story design): Wish fulfillment. As in all wish fulfillment stories, the main character does nothing *consciously* to achieve her wish that, in this case, is for companionship and travel. She achieves her wish *because of what she is* and this can be discerned only by one who "looks twice."

Theme: Happiness can often be found in unlikely places by "looking twice."

Viewpoint: Omniscient, but not going into the mind of anyone.

Type: This is a "character plus situation" story with considerable "literary" value, though it is at the same time a fully plotted story. Note that Rosy's situation at the End is very different from what it was at the Beginning. Also, the relationship of the two characters has radically changed.

Main Character (Actor A): Rosy. In most stories the character who *acts*, and by his acts brings about the change in circumstances, is the main character, but this is not the case in a wish fulfillment story. Here, the main character is always the one whose wish is fulfilled because of what he *is*, or because of his *right action* in a matter unconnected with his wish. The story of Cinderella is a classic example of the wish fulfillment story.

Number of Characters: Two.

Story in One Sentence: Rosy is very lonely and no one looks at her twice to see how attractive she really is until the young man from Texas looks at her twice and promptly carries her off.

Beginning: This story has a comparatively long Beginning. This is not at all unusual in short short stories, where it sometimes takes considerable time to establish the situation out of which the real story develops. The Beginning ends with the words, ". . . and he might have gone on into town, where there was a real auto camp, if he hadn't have happened to look twice at Rosy . . . and he fell to whistling softly as he jingled the change in his hand." At this point all the factors are established that will work themselves out in the Body and End.

Body: The Body begins as the young man from Texas makes his first move toward fulfilling Rosy's wish by showing interest in her. This is shown by his words, " 'You say you've got a cottage for rent for the night?' he asked her." The Body ends with the young man ready to leave as so many others had done. The story is built to a real Black Moment at this point . . . there appears to be no hope for better things for Rosy. The Body ends with the words, ". . . fat Rosy stood there with one foot on the running board, hungrily *looking her last* at him, . . ."

End: The End begins with the sentence, "And this young fellow from Texas, he saw the soft gray of her eyes again, and their eyes caught and held . . ." It ends with his words, " 'We're a-going to Texas,' he said, 'that's where we're a-going!' " The *story* actually ends here, but it is not yet complete.

Sequel: The Sequel follows the End of the story and is very brief. It ties up loose ends, tells the reader that now Rosy is happy, she is pretty, which has been foreshadowed all through the story. Here also, the future of these young people is taken care of, leaving the reader with the assurance that both are going to be very happy indeed.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. Setting: The setting is familiar to every reader who has seen many small, lonely filling stations with a handful of cottages for over-night renting.
2. The story's strong emotional appeal: Sympathy is aroused for Rosy. She is lonely. She just misses being pretty. Liking is aroused for Rosy. She is imaginative, longs for affection, travel, adventure. Consequently, the reader is *for* her, and hopes Rosy will find happiness.
3. The story is built to a sharp Black Moment when it seems that all hope for Rosy is lost. This creates suspense, an emotion all readers *like* to feel.
4. Unifying forces: These are very strong in this story. The story takes place in one setting, which always helps to unify a story. The time lapse is short, perhaps fifteen or sixteen hours. The repetition of key words and phrases is used most effectively. Texas is planted early in the story. This prepares the reader for the arrival of the young man from Texas and for his taking Rosy to Texas. The style of this story is especially noteworthy because of its simplicity, clarity, pictorial quality, specific detail and excellent presentation.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character is unhappy and longs to escape from an alien environment. That character is taken out of that environment by another character having sufficient discernment to see the main character's real worth.

Buttonholes

BY

BEN HUR LAMPMAN

(Published in the Portland *Oregonian* as a signed column and in the *Atlantic Monthly,* August 1946. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by the author, Ben Hur Lampman.)

Nearly fifty years ago, in a college town beside a pleasant river back East, there lived an angular, apologetic woman, and silent, whose calling in life was the working of buttonholes. Miss Sheila Smink worked buttonholes every day of her life except Sunday, for two cents a buttonhole, and it was by this means that she kept her old mother, a wisp of a woman who seemed always to have been old, quite as Sheila Smink seemed never to have been young.

So many years have passed with the flow of the river since Miss Smink, as everyone called her, worked her last buttonhole, that we need not feel sorry for her now, any more than folks did when she worked buttonholes for them—and, besides, there were certain sorts of buttonholes, such as the carefully corded ones in broadcloth coats, for which Sheila Smink received five cents apiece. But in spite of this her pale nose was forever near to her needle.

How dear it was to Sheila Smink, when she thought of her appointed task, and the number of buttonholes which constituted a day, to know that when people spoke of her and her craftsmanship they said, "Miss Smink's buttonholes will outwear the garment." This presents to fancy a vast array of garmentless buttonholes, marching and countermarching, perhaps playing croquet or stooping to prayer; but when it was said, it approximated the truth. An awareness of it enabled Shelia Smink to snip off a thread as smartly as ever when her back ached and her shy pale-blue eyes were more than ever like frightened skim milk. If ever you have written a great poem or constructed an Odd Fellow's block you will know how the buttonhole maker felt when they praised her. It seemed then to Miss Smink that life had its significance.

A buttonhole specialist in those times, when there were neither snaps nor zippers, had only hooks-and-eyes to compete with, and most women favored buttons, an abundance of buttons, with a buttonhole for each. Most of the waists buttoned all the way down the back. These were

prolific of two-cent rewards. What a windfall! But some of the goods would be fine, sheer organdy, and even in Miss Smink's skilled hands this fabric fought with the buttonhole maker.

By the simplest of calculations you will know how many buttonholes Miss Smink worked to earn a dollar. Luck was with her, however, as it was with her mother, for the house in which they lived was their own, and there were only the taxes. There were only the taxes because Sheila Smink found, in her years of endeavor, that she never could work quite enough buttonholes to afford to have the house painted. We shall be reconciled to this, if she wasn't—though she did not complain—for the house was more buttonhole factory than home.

Yet it was home, nevertheless, and a rose crept over the front-porch lattice, and there were two rockers on the porch, and at the gate stood a clump of syringa which in its season was a great comfort to Sheila Smink. A great comfort—and at times a sore trial.

In good times and bad times there was always a demand for well-worked buttonholes, and Miss Smink had reason to thank Providence, as she did, for its concern over her well-being. There were so many buttonholes to make that now and then the members of the Ladies' Aid, when planning a church sociable, were accustomed to raise and dismiss the question of Sheila Smink's baking a cake.

"Will Miss Smink have time to bake us a three-layer chocolate cake?" Mrs. J. K. Elmire would ask.

Perhaps it would be Mrs. Frank T. Atkins who would answer, "Goodness, no! Miss Smink has too many buttonholes to make! There's my Susie's party dress, and it must be ready by Tuesday!"

Sometimes it would be somebody's wedding dress that required buttonholes. When they brought her a wedding dress, to work buttonholes, Sheila Smink used to say, "Oh, my! Such beautiful goods! Such nice silk!" She would promise, though nobody ever asked her, to be real careful. But Miss Smink always was careful. And sometimes it would be the ruffled blouse of a small boy, or a frock for a little girl. Then Miss Smink would exclaim, "Oh, isn't it cute!"

2

Is it hard to make buttonholes? If you had made as many thousands of them as Sheila Smink made, at two cents a buttonhole, sometimes five, you wouldn't think it was hard. You would merely see buttonholes, buttonholes, buttonholes before your closed eyes those nights when you couldn't go straight to sleep. Sheila Smink used to wonder whether these were buttonholes she had made or ones she should have to make. She wished they would go away. Sometimes it helped to get out of bed and kneel down again to say her prayers a second time. You may count sheep, but she couldn't because of the buttonholes. When you come to see buttonholes in the sleepless hours, it is easy to make buttonholes in the waking ones. To Sheila Smink this was one of the facts of life.

And was she careful! Miss Smink always washed her hands, soaping them heavily, before she put on a fresh apron over her dress and sat down to work buttonholes. From her waist there dangled conveniently three strips of ribbon, clustered, and each bore a property of her calling. One ribbon tethered her buttonhole scissors, the second her emery pad, fashioned like a strawberry, with which to sharpen a tired needle, and the third a beeswax lump for the thread. Somehow, when Miss Smink stood erect, save for the droop of her shoulders, to welcome a buttonhole client, these dangling properties gave her dignity, as though she wore side arms. But you must not misunderstand. Miss Smink was never a figure of mirth to the townspeople of the college town beside the pleasant river. Almost, she herself was institutional.

There goes Miss Smink, hurrying down the street, leaning forward like a schooner's figurehead, with her old straw sailor and her black skirt and blouse, and a carpet-bag in one hand. In her long skirts Sheila Smink moved as though she were on rollers. Those times she would be taking a dress back to a patron, its buttonholes finished, or carrying another garment home to her buttonhole factory. Long after dark, if you walked down Elm Street and glanced in at the bay window, you could see Miss Smink bent over her buttonholes.

The syringa was in blossom again—and you know how fragrant it was—the mock orange that grew beside Sheila Smink's front gate; the selfsame syringa which of spring nights cast the last shadow before you came to the arc light where the great beetles were whirling. And mixed with the scent of the syringa was the breathing of lilacs. Footsteps down Elm Street. They stopped in the shadow, and laughter was part of the softness of the night. Then silence. Then laughter again, but low, whispering laughter. And silence. Soft silence and the whiteness of the sweet mock orange that cast the last shadow. Footsteps again on the wooden sidewalk. How many a springtime!

From her porch, where she sat in one of the two old rockers, resting her eyes, Sheila Smink watched them, the boy and the girl, walk hand in hand into the unsteady radiance of the arc light. She leaned forward in her rocking chair and watched them cross the street to enter the shadow again. Then Sheila Smink went slowly into the house, her eyes rested by the cool spring darkness, to work more buttonholes.

Analysis of "Buttonholes"

Length: Approximately 1200 words.

Plot (or story design): A build-up of emotion toward the main character.

This is a story design rather than a plot, in the usually accepted

meaning of the word, and one that appears in many types of magazines.

Theme: Pride in doing one's work well is a major satisfaction in life.

Viewpoint: Omniscient, not going into the consciousness of any character.

Type: A slice of life, character story.

Main Character: Sheila Smink.

Number of Characters: One. Though two women have a single speech each, they are background characters only, having no effect on the story itself.

Story in One Sentence: Sheila Smink spends her whole life uncomplainingly making buttonholes, taking pride in work well done, missing all the great experiences of life.

Beginning: The Beginning ends with the words, "It seemed then to Miss Smink that life had its significance." In the first paragraph the *when, where, who* and *what* of the story are fully established in probably the fewest possible number of words. Liking for Miss Smink is created at once—she works every day to support her old mother. Sympathy is built in the same way, and also because she is so poorly paid and her work is so monotonous. Sympathy is further built by the second paragraph.

In the third paragraph Sheila Smink's pride in her work—the only thing that could possibly make that work endurable—is clearly established. Also her courage and that somehow she manages to find significance in her life. The reader now has before him *all* the factors that go into the making of the rest of the story. After this no really new element is introduced.

Body: The Body ends at the high emotional point of the scene where Miss Smink observes the boy and girl. She sees the romance she has never had and will never have. The Body ends with the simple, poignant phrase, "How many a springtime!"

End: The End is the final paragraph. Note that it is written from the objective viewpoint. The reader is not told what she feels nor thinks. He is merely shown *what she does.* Any other treatment of this final scene would almost certainly have resulted in a weak, maudlin and sentimental scene. Naturally, a skilled writer such as Mr. Lampman assuredly is would never make a mistake of that kind. He has presented the scene objectively, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions and to react emotionally as he pleases.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. Mr. Lampman's style, marked by the greatest simplicity and gem-like clarity is a prime factor in creating and holding reader interest. This is a literary story.
2. The sympathy the reader feels at once for Sheila Smink. This

sympathy grows to liking as she is shown to be courageous, uncomplaining, without self-pity.

3. The specific details of Sheila Smink's calling. These give authenticity to the story, help to make it believable.
4. The many sensory appeals, among them being the scent of the syringa and the "breathing of the lilacs." All these specific details help to create pictures and give the reader the pleasures of recognition.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character, bravely and without self-pity, leads a restricted life of monotonous work for the good of another.

The Policeman and the Pirate

BY

DALE CLARK

(Published in the *American Magazine*, November 1946. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by Lurton Blassingame, agent for the author.)

Desk Sergeant Toohey had expected an older woman. The young one talking to Patrolman Reuter would have been pretty anywhere. In the drab, dark-shadowed police station her blondness was vivid and gleaming.

"Yacht Harbor," Mary Hammond was saying. "I can't understand it. What was he doing there?"

"Playing," Reuter said. "A lot of kids hang out around the pool. They play pirates."

Mary Hammond said, "Yes, I know. We used to live on Blount Street, and Davy used to play at the pool, but that was two years ago. He's too grown-up for those games now."

Sergeant Toohey made a disparaging noise. "A-a-ah, he talks big. My kids, too. I figure it's from the radio. They listen to them programs and they try to talk like they hear on the radio." The sergeant's large red hand shuffled papers. "Dutch," he told Reuter, "go on back and get her kid while she's helping fill out the missing person's clearance . . . You spell it with two m's, lady? David Hammond, age what?"

Mrs. Hammond smiled up at him. "It's David Webb, with two b's, Officer. Davy was my sister's child."

"Oh. You're raising somebody else's kid?" Sergeant Toohey's throat formed a different, kindlier noise. His large red face relaxed indulgently. "Pardon me for sounding personal," he said affably, "but you got my sympathy. Me and my wife made that same mistake of adopting an orphan. Boy, what a headache we wished on ourselves."

The young woman's lovely eyes showed surprised annoyance. She said, "But my husband and I don't consider Davy a mistake. We've always felt just as if he was our own, ever since he was a baby."

"That's how you think you think, lady. You'll find out otherwise, maybe. You'd be surprised how often it happens, like it did with us," Toohey brooded; "your own flesh and blood being born after you adopted somebody else's."

"As a matter of fact," Mary Hammond said, "we have Junior, and he hasn't made the least difference in our feeling for Davy."

She gave a little cry as Patrolman Reuter bunted open a rear door and led in the small, sleepy boy. "Davy," she said. "Oh, dear, the police stuffed you with ice cream, didn't they? Look; it's running out of your ears." Her voice shook and her hand shook as she opened her purse. She snatched out a handkerchief and knelt to busy it at the boy's face.

"Don't blame me for that," Sergeant Toohey said harshly. "Any brat of mine ran away from home, I'd send him to bed without any ice cream or any supper, either."

"And coal dust!" the young woman exclaimed. "Davy, you didn't get coal dust playing at the pool!"

"He probably got it playing with this, Mrs. Hammond," Patrolman Reuter offered.

Mary Hammond stared at the wooden lath sword in the policeman's hand. "Good gracious, David, where did you dig that thing up? You haven't played with it for years."

The little boy's eyes were screwed tight, his lips puckered tight, as she dabbed at his face. His voice came through the handkerchief: "It was in the janitor's room."

"The janitor's—! Davy, you mean you went back to the Blount Street apartment, too? What made you do that?"

"I don't know. I just thought it would be fun, I guess." The handkerchief had left the small, round face flushed.

Mary Hammond shook her blond head, helplessly. "But what did Mr. Williams say? What did you tell him? Didn't he ask what you were doing there?"

"It wasn't Mr. Williams. It's a new janitor. It's a different bunch of kids at the pool, too. You know," Davy said thoughtfully, "it wasn't so much like home, like the good old times I used to have there."

"Home," the young woman said. She stuffed the handkerchief back into her purse, put her hands on the boy's shoulders. "But, dear, we have a new home now. You have good times now, too, don't you? You and Junior have a whole big yard to yourselves. You *like* the yard to play in, don't you?"

"Yes'm. But you can't wade and sail boats in it, either. I liked the other home better."

Sergeant Toohey's throat formed an alarming, explosive sound. Mary Hammond shook her head at Toohey. She made her voice cheerfully, modernly reasonable: "David, we needn't go into all that again. We needed more room when Junior came to live with us. You understand that. Besides, it's only little eight- and nine-year-olds who wade and sail boats in the pool."

Sergeant Toohey glared down at David. "Besides, kid," he said sternly, "there's no excuse for running off without a word to nobody. You know what I'd do if you was my brat, do you?"

The young woman caught her breath. "Davy," she said, "you've had

quite enough excitement for one day. Say good night to the policeman."

"Good night," Davy said. He stretched a hand to Patrolman Reuter. "May I take my sword now?"

"I figured you wasn't liable to forget that, Cap'n Kidd." The patrolman grinned at Mary Hammond. "You know, he was sleeping back there with his arms around it. Like a doll."

"Wel-l," Mrs. Hammond said, suddenly uncertain. Her eyes worried over the sharpened lath. She made her voice extremely reasonable: "Swords are all right for big boys, David, but I wonder about Junior. He might pick this up and fall on it. We wouldn't want Junior to hurt himself, would we, dear?"

The little boy looked up at her, his lips trembling.

Sergeant Toohey spoke first, triumphantly: "What'd I tell you, lady? It's like I told my missus. Look, I said; our own comes first. *Your* own comes first, too." He scowled. "That's how it is, and that's how it's always going to be. The other one's got to learn to play second fiddle and like it, and none of this running away because he's jealous—"

"Hush!" the young woman said in a stifled voice. "What are you saying in front of—" Her voice broke off. She moistened her lips. "It isn't true, anyway. Just because this sword is sharp doesn't mean *that*."

"This time it's the sword you're taking away from him. Tomorrow it'll be something else. It's always going to be something else, and it's always going to be for the same reason. A-a-ah," Sergeant Toohey muttered as she shook her blond head at him, "you're not kidding anybody. You're not fooling who you think, either. You better learn him his lesson the hard way while he's young enough." He thrust a large red hand over the desk. "Can he have his sword?" Sergeant Toohey scoffed. "Give me that lath, Dutch. I'll show him. I'll bust it in two."

"You will not. I never heard of anything so utterly repulsive." Color flooded into Mary Hammond's face as she turned, snatched the sword from Reuter, and grabbed the small boy's arm with her other hand. "All right, Davy, but just remember it's *your* sword. Junior isn't to be allowed to even touch it."

She turned at the street door. "And I certainly feel sorry for any child *you* adopted!" she cried.

Patrolman Reuter stared around from the closing door. "You adopted—?" he marveled. "What were you giving the dame, Sarge? You didn't buy the ice cream? Or you wanted to bust the sword? Say, who was telling the pirate stories until the kid fell asleep listening?"

Sergeant Toohey cleared his throat, rustled papers on his desk. "The kid listened, Dutch. But high-class dames like her don't take any friendly advice of a cop. They just don't. Sometimes you got to put yourself in their shoes—so they see you, and see what they look like, themselves."

Analysis of "The Policeman and the Pirate"

Length: Approximately 1100 words.

Plot (or story design): Purpose Accomplishment by means of Ingenuity.

Theme: A person may unconsciously follow a course of action that becomes abhorrent to him when he realizes the significance of his actions.

Viewpoint: Desk Sergeant Toohey, third person.

Type: A story that legitimately misleads the reader as to the real situation, the revelation of the truth furnishing the surprise ending. I use the term "legitimately misleads the reader" because when the true situation is revealed, it is more dramatic and more emotionally appealing than the purported situation. Never write the story in which the revealed situation is *less* important or dramatic than the purported situation. When you do this, you end with an anticlimax, leaving the reader dissatisfied because he feels that he has wasted his time reading your story.

Main Character: Sergeant Toohey.

Number of Characters: Four. Reuter is very minor, yet he is introduced in the first paragraph, and appears briefly three times after that before the final paragraph, where he actually functions in giving the explanation of Sergeant Toohey's behavior and reveals the true situation.

Story in One Sentence: Desk Sergeant Toohey brings Mary Hammond to the realization that she is showing favoritism toward her own child at the expense of her adopted child, whereupon she changes her line of action.

Beginning: The Beginning of this story is fairly brief. It ends with the words, "Davy was my sister's child." At this point every factor that will be worked out in the Body, End and Sequel has been planted, even to the true character of Sergeant Toohey. Irish policemen are proverbially kind and understanding toward children. Consequently, the astute reader is never *really* convinced that Sergeant Toohey is the ogre he appears to be. When the end comes, the reader accepts it as logical and even inevitable.

Body: The Body begins with Sergeant Toohey summing up the situation with the words, "Oh. You're raising somebody else's kid?" and with his first effort to achieve his purpose for the story when he says, " 'Pardon me for sounding personal,' he said affably, 'but you got my sympathy. Me and my wife made that same mistake of adopting an orphan. Boy, what a headache we wished on ourselves.' " The end of the Body comes with the words, " 'Can he have his sword?' Sergeant Toohey scoffed. 'Give me that lath, Dutch. I'll show him. I'll

bust it in two.'" At this point the story has been developed to the highest possible point of drama and suspense. What will Mary Hammond do now?

End: The End begins with Mary Hammond's words, "You will not." In the rest of this paragraph Mary Hammond shows by what she *says* and what she *does* that there will be no more favoritism shown Junior. The End comes with her words, "And I certainly feel sorry for any child *you* adopted!" Though the *story* ends there, in the sense that the purpose of Actor A has been accomplished, the story is not complete. Therefore, in a very brief sequel the real character and plan of Sergeant Toohey is revealed, and the reader is told why Sergeant Toohey acted as he did. The story ends with a statement of the theme, in the words of Actor A.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The story starts moving immediately. The situation, that of a child who has become lost and has been picked up by the police, is universally appealing. The situation becomes more appealing when it is revealed that the child is adopted.
2. Clash between the two main characters begins with the words, "The young woman's lovely eyes showed surprised annoyance." There is always interest when two characters react emotionally toward each other. This clash builds in a steadily rising series of climaxes until it reaches the highest climax of all at the end of the Body. Here Mary is furiously angry with Sergeant Toohey. Mary *shows* her rising indignation by outward physical evidence of inner disturbance. The reader believes what he *sees* far more readily than what he is *told*.
3. Economy of words. There is hardly a word that could be taken out of this story and yet leave it understandable and effective.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: A main character, by making himself appear what he is not, causes the secondary character to see himself as he is and change his course of conduct.

A Lover for Sara

BY

LOUIS KAMP

(Published in *Cosmopolitan*, August 1946. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by William Morris Agency, Inc., agent for the author.)

Sam Taylor was trying to read the newspaper when his wife Sara came and reminded him that he was supposed to go and get the groceries. She pulled his hair. "Make out a list, you," she said.

Sam had a way of rolling his tongue in his cheek whenever he was writing. He proceeded to write, now, on the back of an old envelope against the wall of the kitchen.

"Sam," his wife said with exasperation, "can't you write at a table like an ordinary man? Are you really trying to drive me crazy?"

Sam turned his long, tanned face and grinned at Sara over the shoulder of his red and black lumberjack shirt. His eyes were patient. He waited.

"Oh, what's the use?" Sara said irritably. "Where was I?—vegetables, meat, milk—oh, yes, get a dozen fresh eggs. Get the white eggs, Sam. Ask Mr. Binky for his best. And make sure he doesn't give you the brown ones!" Sara was thoughtful for a moment. "Yes, I guess that's all—oh, and Sam, *please*—when you ask Mr. Binky for the butter, don't shout it out in front of all the other customers. Just take him aside and remind him that he promised to save me—"

Sara stopped when she noticed that Sam was doing ticktacktoe on the envelope. Her voice rose. "Sam! You haven't been listening to me at all. Read me what you've got written on that list!"

Sam grinned.

"Sam, *please*—you may have left something out, and the stores will be closed tomorrow."

Sam leaned against the wall, cleared his throat and began reading: "One pack marijuana cigarettes, two underground tickets to Mexico—ask Binky for them under the counter—"

Sara's face changed swiftly from irritation to anger. "Sam!"

"—one dozen cyclotrons," Sam went on in his amiable, droning voice, "and fifty pounds of uranium—insist on U235—"

"Sam, stop it!"

"—two concrete atomic bomb shelters, sizes fourteen and thirty-eight, equipped with respirators and forged passports . . ."

Sara moved toward her husband with her mouth tight and her hands clenched into small tight fists.

". . . one volume of 'Héloïse and Abelard' so I can read to my wife, Sara, when we're the last people alive in the world—"

Sara snatched the list out of Sam's hands. There were no cyclotrons on it. She gave the list back to Sam and shoved him toward the kitchen door. "Get to the store," she said, "get out of here before I . . ."

At the half-open door Sam turned and made his face grave. "Mommie?"

"Oh, *Sam*—I hate you! Will you please, please go?"

Sam smiled gently, took a deep breath and stared at Sara as though he were trying to fill his eyes with the sight of her. "It may be a short life," he said. "In case anything happens—I love you, Sara."

Before she could reply, Sam was outside on the gravel path going toward the garage. Sara shook her head and began to clear the breakfast dishes. She paused for a moment, listening to Sam's voice speaking to someone outside and then she heard the car starting. She sighed and went on with her work. The back door opened and annoyance rose in her with the false, quick smile on her face. It was old man Killifer, who lived next door.

"Mornin', Sara," the little old man said. "What you doin' inside on a mornin' like this?"

Sara glanced at the golden light pouring in through the window and laughed politely. "I've got dishes to do."

"Jest set my sprinkler out on the back lawn, and I'll bet there's a hundred blackbirds out there takin' a bath. Yes siree—it's goin' to be a beautiful day."

"Maybe I'll come out after I get the dishes done," Sara said. "How's Mrs. Killifer?"

"Fine and dandy," the old man said. "She's settin' out in the garden watchin' them birds. Ought to leave them dishes and come out and watch 'em yourself."

"I'd only have to do them later," Sara said. "Anyway, Sam is taking me to Rock Canyon this afternoon. You know they're opening up that wonderful new swimming pool. It's dammed up in the canyon—"

"Don't hold with swimmin'," old man Killifer said, shaking his shiny-pink, bald head. "Dangerous."

"Nonsense. Sam and I are excellent swimmers."

"Don't hold with it!" the old man insisted. "Say, Sam tells me he's buyin' a McCormick International Dis—now what was it he said—a Dis—Disintegrator. A McCormick International Disintegrator—that's what he said. Said he was goin' to New York City to buy one of these here

McCormick machines—said to keep it under my hat—said the OPA is releasin' 'em now." Old man Killifer seemed puzzled. "Sam and you gone and bought a farm or somethin', Sara?"

Sara made a grimace. "Oh, that's just Sam's talk. He's been reading about the atomic bomb and—"

"Atoms?" Old man Killifer snorted. "Don't believe in 'em. Don't believe in anythin' you can't see."

"But Mr. Killifer," Sara said, holding herself very still, "it's in all the papers and magazines—I mean about the atomic bombs that were dropped in Japan. Thousands of people died in a matter of seconds—"

"Don't you believe it, Sara," the old man said. "Them Japs couldn't think up anything like that. Just some politicians tryin' to stir up trouble."

Sara felt suddenly as though she were suffocating.

"Listen to me, Mr. Killifer," she said slowly and carefully. "*We* invented it—scientists in the United States. The bombs were dropped from our planes over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sam said—"

"Sam see it?" Mr. Killifer looked amused.

Sara shook her head dumbly and felt like screaming.

Old man Killifer spread his wrinkled hands. "Know anybody who ever saw it—personal?"

Sara just stared.

"Big hoax," said old man Killifer. "Political hoax."

"But scientists all over the world, Mr. Killifer," Sara said desperately, "in England, France, Russia—"

"Foreigners!" old man Killifer snorted contemptuously. "Less you have to do with 'em, the better!"

Sara felt her reason spinning away. "How's your wife's rheumatism, Mr. Killifer?" she said frantically.

Old man Killifer brightened. "Fine and dandy! Martha's settin' out in the sun—must be a hundred—must be two hundred blackbirds out there takin' a bath—sure do love those birds, Sara. You leave those dishes set and come on out."

Sara passed her hand over her eyes. They felt awfully tired. "Sam's taking me to the new swimming pool—"

"Don't hold with swimmin'—dangerous!" Old man Killifer said. "What's Sam goin' to do with a McCormick International Disintegrator?"

"I don't know," Sara said wearily.

"Well," old man Killifer said, "better be gittin' back to Martha—you better git out in the sun, Sara. Pretty young gal like you cooped up indoors. Ought to git out—gittin' to look a mite peaked."

Sara was sweeping the kitchen floor when she heard the car return. She heard Sam slam the garage doors, and she stood still to listen to his voice yelling something at old man Killifer and his wife. And then, hearing Sam's loud, brassy laughter as he came toward their house, a sudden

warm sense of safety swept her and she wanted to cry with relief. Sam banged clumsily into the kitchen. The sight of him standing there, holding the bag of groceries, made Sara's heart swell.

"Wait till I tell you!" he burst out, "someone tipped off the FBI about Binky's black market, and three squad cars full of cops raided the joint. I had to run like hell, so I didn't get the marijuana cigarettes—"

"I know," Sara said through the lump in her throat. "I heard about it over the radio, Sam."

"Huh?" Sam said with real surprise. He put the groceries down on the table and stared at Sara.

"Mr. Binky was out of butter?"

"Yeah," Sam said wonderingly. "How'd you know?"

"Sam—Sam, I've got to tell you something—"

"Sara," Sam said with alarm. He led her into the living room. "Is anything the matter, honey?"

"It's just that I've got a lover . . ."

"Yeah? Think of that!" he said. He put his arm around Sara as he sat down, paper in hand.

"He's got two heads and a heart of gold . . ."

"Think of that!" Sam said. "What else?"

"He's kind of a foreigner—speaks the English language backwards, and when he's worried he laughs."

"My, my," Sam said, smiling. "Tell me more."

Sara could hardly speak and her eyes were filling up. "I'm going to run away—oh, Sam, darling, I'm going to run away with him in his McCormick International Disintegrator . . . Sam—oh, Sammm!"

"Don't cry honey," Sam said. "You don't have to run away. Why can't the three of us live here together?"

"I—I never knew how much he loved me."

"That's because you're such a pretty girl, Sara."

"Am I, Sam, really?"

"Yes, ma'am!" Sam said.

"Sam—I'm sorry I yelled at you; you can write the grocery list on the ceiling if you want to—"

After Sam kissed Sara he held her off and stared at her with great concern. "Sara—what's come over you since I went to the store?"

Sara buried her face against Sam's loud shirt and shivered. "I just found out you're the sanest man I know. I'd go crazy if anything terrible happened to the world and you weren't near me."

Sam held her close and said softly, calmly, "Maybe it might all turn out okay. Don't worry, Sara. Just stick with me, and we'll have fun as long as we can."

"Oh, Sam, hold me tighter and say something silly, please, please—I'm scared."

Analysis of "A Lover for Sara"

Length: Approximately 1500 words.
Plot (or story design): Misunderstanding, Discovery and Reversal.
Theme: It is good to face danger and uncertainty with courage and gaiety.
Viewpoint: Omniscient, but going into no one's consciousness except Sara's.
Type: A timely story having profound social significance, presented with a light touch.
Main Character: Sara.
Number of Characters: Three.
Story in One Sentence: Sara is deeply annoyed by Sam's whimsicality, but on discovering that his gaiety is an expression of courage, she admires and loves him more than ever.
Beginning: The beginning ends with Sam's words, "'It may be a short life,' he said. 'In case anything happens—I love you, Sara.'" At this point every factor in Sara's misunderstanding has been established. Sam's courage and his love for her have been planted.
Body: The Body ends with the words, ". . . and she stood still to listen to his voice yelling something at old man Killifer and his wife." All factors for Sara's discovery have been established previous to this point. From here on is the End, showing Sara's complete reversal.

This is one of the *very few* published stories in which all characters affecting the outcome of the story are not established in the Beginning. The story would have had greater unity had that been done in this case, and also if old man Killifer had appeared briefly in the Ending. The story now has a tendency to break into three parts.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The reader knows at once how he is expected to feel toward these characters. This is of the utmost importance, since the reader feels little, if any interest in fictional characters until he responds to them emotionally. Liking is built immediately for both Sara and Sam. Readers like and wish the best for people in love. That Sam and Sara are in love is established by Sara's playfully pulling his hair and ordering him to make a list. Three paragraphs later the reader is told that Sam's eyes are patient. Patience is a likable characteristic. The reader understands Sara's exasperation with Sam's whimsicality so doesn't criticize her for being sharp with him. His active imagination is interesting, appealing and slightly amusing. It individualizes him, makes

him a real person. The reader is for both main characters and therefore is interested in them.

2. Contrast: In this story sharp, even exaggerated contrasts are used with excellent effect. There is contrast between Sara's practicality and Sam's apparent impracticality, and also between Sam's whimsicality and old man Killifer's stuffiness, disbelief and lack of imagination. There is also—and this is important—contrast between Sara's attitude toward Sam in the Beginning and her attitude toward him at the End. Note that she doesn't merely *say* she has changed; she *shows* that change by matching Sam's whimsicality with her own.
3. Wide appeal: This story possesses practically universal appeal because it deals with a situation of which every thinking adult is more or less deeply aware; the potential threat of the atomic bomb and of the world situation. However, note that neither is specifically mentioned. The story *shows* an admirable feeling and course of action regarding this matter, without the slightest hint of "preaching." The story has high entertainment value and will arouse interest even in those on whom its theme will have slight impact. In other words, here is, *first of all,* good entertainment. Theme and significance are *added values.* The short short that has high entertainment value and a slight or no theme, will sell. The short short with the finest theme in the world, but low in entertainment value, will not sell.
4. Unity: The story is unified by being in one setting. It accomplishes one purpose, that of changing Sara's mind about Sam. It is further unified by the summing up of the gist of the story very near the end when Sam says: "Maybe it might all turn out okay. Don't worry, Sara. Just stick with me and we'll have fun as long as we can."

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character mistakingly evaluates true courage as a light and uncomprehending attitude of mind, but the action of the story convinces him that this belief is incorrect.

The Puzzle-Knot

BY

WALTER C. BROWN

(Published in *This Week*, October 13, 1946. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by Paul R. Reynolds & Son, 599 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, New York, and the author, Walter C. Brown.)

There was Cham Tai, master of Han history, a man of wealth, tall, lean, and showing his years in the gray of his hair. There was his wife Mai-an, a slender, dark-eyed beauty, young and wilful. And there was Yuan Kee, Cham's trusted secretary, of an age with pretty little Mai-an, and quite handsome. Two men and one woman. A situation older than the first written word.

In the countries of the West it is called a "triangle"; but in Cham Tai's province of the Land of the Dragon, it is spoken of as a "puzzle-knot." Men have called it by many different names, but the problem is the same in all languages. And each man must work out his own solution.

"Aye," it was said, "Cham Tai is a very learned man—a man of great knowledge, but small wisdom. He can recite the history of every Han emperor, relate countless tales of scandal concerning empresses dead these two thousand years; yet he does not see what is taking place under his own roof. *Ai-yee,* it is a great pity!"

But they were mistaken. For from what happened afterward, it was evident that Cham Tai was fully aware of the "puzzle-knot" in his household, and his plans for solving it must have been worked out to the smallest detail before he set out for the Valley of the Hundred Graves.

This Valley was Cham Tai's own secret discovery, the crowning achievement of a lifetime devoted to research and exploration of Han relics. It lay hidden in a remote and desolate stretch of the Bald Mountains, and it contained long rows of Han graves, sealed-up tombs standing untouched through twenty centuries of Time.

Cham Tai's explorations there had been cut short when the tides of war swept across the Bald Mountains, forcing him to abandon his research and flee for his life. But now the Brown Devils had been conquered and cast forth from the land, and Cham was free to return to the Valley and explore its priceless historical relics.

And so they took their departure—Cham Tai, Mai-an, his wife, and Yuan Kee, the young secretary.

After several days' journey they came to the city where the caravans gather for the plodding march westward across the barren, sandy wastes.

Making arrangements to travel with a certain tea-caravan, Cham Tai busied himself hiring coolies, gathering together supplies, and buying the required number of riding horses and sturdy pack donkeys needed for the trip.

On the tenth day of the Moon of Rice, they set out with the tinkling caravan, following an ancient post road still marked by the guiding pyramids of heaped stones that had been set up, hundreds of years ago, by order of Genghis Khan.

Of the three, only Cham Tai was in usual spirits. The petulant Mai-an rode in silence, her dark eyes sullen, her lacquer-red lips still pouting because Cham Tai had ignored her protests against coming on this uncomfortable trek into the wilds. Young Yuan Kee, too, was silent—but watchful.

At last, at the thirty-seventh stone marker beyond Red Turtle Mountain, they parted company with the tea-caravan. For seven days Cham Tai led them southward, following narrow valleys that were like sword cuts between blunt, rough-hewn mountains. The valleys, of sun-baked sand and clay and gravel, were waterless, treeless, bare even of grass.

It was a land of parched desolation, of an eerie, empty stillness that reduced all, masters and servants alike, to taut silence, broken only by the gurgling slap-slap of the water cans tightly roped on the donkeys' backs.

By that time Mai-an was no longer pouting; she was frightened. Moistening her painted lips with the tip of her little pink tongue, she darted apprehensive glances from the pale, uneasy face of Yuan Kee to the stern, impassive mask of Cham Tai, her husband.

Late on the seventh day they came into the Valley of Graves.

"*Hai!* Nothing is changed—nothing disturbed!" Cham Tai exulted. "The Brown Devils did not find their way here."

Mai-an stared at the grim, barren landscape with fear and distaste. A great uneasiness filled her; for days she had waited for a chance to exchange her whispered fear with Yuan Kee, but somehow Cham Tai's shadow was always between them.

Now, brisk and curt, Cham Tai gave his orders for the making of camp—his own tent to be placed here, Mai-an's tent to the left, Yuan Kee's to the right. Then the trail driver and the pack coolies were directed to set up their own camp some distance away.

"We will do no more today," Cham Tai announced. "After we have taken rice, we will retire to our tents and sleep, that we may all be rested and freshened for the morrow."

So they retired, and slept. But in the morning Cham Tai was awakened by loud voices, edged by panic, calling his name. "Awaken, Cham Tai!" Yuan Kee was shouting. "We have fallen into the hands of thieves! Our men are gone—the horses—the precious water—everything."

"Rouse yourself, My Lord!" Mai-an was wailing. "They have all run away in the night! *Ai-yee*, they have left us alone to perish!"

But Cham Tai rose without haste. *"Tsai!* Cease your shouting, both of you," he ordered curtly. "The men have not run away. They have been paid off and sent away—by my orders!"

"But, but why, My Lord?" Mai-an stammered.

"Because of a certain matter pertaining to the three of us that must be settled," Cham Tai replied evenly. "It is not fitting that coolie ears should overhear our words."

Mai-an understood then, and her smooth cheeks grew paler than the rice powder which covered them. And Yuan Kee understood also, for his lips tightened.

"I shall speak out in plain words," Cham Tai declared. "I have heard whispers of evil doings under the roof of Cham Tai. It is said that Mai-an, his wife, has forgotten her marriage vows." He looked at her sternly. "Is this true?"

"It is a lie!" Mai-an cried. "A thrice-accursed lie! My Lord, I swear—" Then her pretty face wilted before Cham Tai's pitiless gaze, and she shrank back, silent.

"And you, Yuan Kee?" Cham Tai turned to his secretary. "What answer do you make?" he asked inexorably.

Yuan Kee's shoulders were rigid. "This much is truth, Cham Tai," he said falteringly, "that words of love have passed between us—"

Mai-an cried out in frightened protest, but Yuan continued unheeding: "This I cannot deny, Cham Tai; but the fault does not lie upon Mai-an's head, nor yet upon mine. I swear by Tao that love came to us unbidden and unsought. It came from the Lords of Destiny—a gift."

"Aye!" Cham Tai said bitterly. "A gift—at *my* expense! Have I not already shared enough with you, Yuan Kee? Did I not open my doors to you, share with you my knowledge, my hopes and plans, so that we might work loyally side by side, like father and son?"

Yuan Kee bowed his head; his face was flushed with shame.

"And you, Mai-an?" Cham's voice sharpened. "Did I not choose you for wife—you, daughter of a house of poverty? Empty handed you came to me, and I gave you my name, my house, and my purse—aye, I gave you silk to wear, and servants to wait upon you. *Tsai!* Now, by way of thanks, you have woven our three lives into a puzzle-knot!"

Cham's voice hardened. "This stain on the House of Cham must be washed away! I have often shown you, Mai-an, the Long Sword of my

ancestors, with this lettering upon the blade: 'It is better to die with honor, than live in dishonor!' "

"You—you would not kill me?" Mai-an sobbed. She was trembling with terror at Cham Tai's relentless tone.

Yuan Kee stepped forward. "Spare her, I beg you, Cham Tai! If there be guilt, let its full burden fall upon me alone. I willingly yield up my life to you, if it will serve to ransom Mai-an from death."

But Cham Tai shook his head grimly. "That cannot be. It is Mai-an who has made this puzzle-knot, and it is she who must unravel it. Your fate, Yuan Kee, I will place in Mai-an's hands. It is she who will decide whether you are to have life—or death!"

They stared at him, puzzled, bewildered. Then Cham Tai went into his tent and returned with a stoppered gourd.

"Hearken!" he said. "We three are alone in this desolate place, without any hope of rescue. When I sent my men away, I kept aside this one small gourd of water. With care, it will sustain one man long enough to reach the caravan trail. You, Mai-an, must choose who that man is to be. If you give this gourd to Yuan Kee, he will depart, and I, your husband, will remain here with you to await death by thirst. If you give the gourd to me, I will depart, and Yuan Kee will remain with you to die. *Wah!* I have spoken!"

Tears raining down her face, Mai-an stood rooted, speechless, staring at the gourd in her hands as though it were a coiled snake.

"Think well, Mai-an!" Cham Tai admonished her harshly. "You hold the power of life or death in your choice. But I do not press you to answer at once. Go into your tent and meditate upon what you will do. Yuan Kee and I will wait until the hour of the setting sun for your decision."

Mai-an opened her lips to plead, but at the frozen look in Cham's eyes she turned helplessly and vanished into her tent. Cham Tai sought the shadow of a near-by rock and seated himself, silent, impassive, smoking his bamboo pipe; Yuan Kee had finally flung himself down on the ground, his face buried on outstretched arms. Nothing moved in the drowsy silence of the parched valley save the slowly creeping shadows.

Finally, as the great brazen wheel touched the rim of the distant mountains, Yuan Kee raised his head and sprang to his feet. "It is the hour of decision!" he shouted hoarsely. "Mai-an, come forth!"

Mai-an did not answer, and Yuan Kee shouted again. Then Cham Tai stood up; he walked to the tent and threw open the flaps at the entrance.

The tent was empty!

"Hai! She is gone!" Yuan cried out. "Mai-an has fled! Behold—here is where she lifted the back cloth and crept out! She is gone, Cham Tai! Here are the prints of her sandals in the sand—"

"Aye, I watched her creeping off long since," Cham announced calmly.

"And mark this—she has taken the water gourd! It seems that Mai-an's choice was to save herself!"

Yuan Kee turned to the other man with a stricken look. "You watched her go—and leave us here to perish?" he exclaimed. "You let her purchase life for herself at the cost of both our deaths?"

Cham gave a dry smile. "It is evident, Yuan Kee," he said, "that Mai-an loves herself above any man, young or old—a truth that has been proven to me on several previous occasions. But do not fear. We shall not perish of thirst, as Mai-an believes. The men I sent away have my orders to return within two days!"

Yuan Kee stared at Cham. "Then—then you knew that Mai-an would prove unworthy of—of an honorable choice!"

"Aye—I counted upon it," Cham Tai announced simply.

Yuan Kee bowed humbly. "Cham Tai," he said, "I stand before you humbled and shamed beyond words, that I have shared this unworthiness. Whatever punishment you—"

But Cham Tai shook his head. "I see no need to punish you. You will punish yourself—remembering how you offered up your own life for that of Mai-an, and the manner of her repayment to you. *Tsai!* You are yet young in years, and wisdom of the heart comes as slowly as wisdom of the head.

"I, too," he continued, "had to learn the difference between polished brass and true gold. Hola! Two short days of thirst is a trifling price to pay for the proper solving of a puzzle-knot!"

Then Cham Tai nodded, smiling wisely. "And now, Yuan Kee, while we are waiting for the men to return, let us start to work. We will open the first of these Han tombs and see what ancient treasures await us. There is not a village in the province that does not boast at least one woman as young and beautiful as Mai-an; but the discovery of a Han tomb—by Tao, that comes to a man but once in a lifetime."

Analysis of "The Puzzle-Knot"

Length: Approximately 1900 words.

Plot (or story design): Purpose Accomplishment by means of Ingenuity.

Theme: The wicked person often brings about his own downfall.

Viewpoint: Omniscient. However, the story at no time enters into the thoughts, feelings or consciousness of the main character, Cham Tai. The reader is taken very briefly into the consciousness of Mai-an in the paragraph that reads as follows: "Mai-an stared at the grim, barren landscape with fear and distaste. A great uneasiness filled her." And again in the phrase, "Mai-an understood

then . . ." In this same paragraph the reader is told, "And Yuan Kee understood also . . ." In these passages the reader is told from the omniscient viewpoint what is going on in the minds and feelings of Mai-an and Yuan Kee.

Type: This is an excellent example of that rare type of story that is based on retributive justice. You seldom read stories of this kind, possibly because they require great skill and specific technical knowledge on the part of the writer. They are closely related to the story of revenge, which is practically taboo in every editorial office, because experience has shown that readers do not like stories of revenge. However, there is a fundamental difference between stories of revenge and stories of retributive justice. Once the writer understands exactly what the difference is, he may be able to take the "revenge" plot that has been in his mind for some time and give it the slant that will make it into a "retributive justice" plot. He will then have a vastly better chance of developing the idea into a salable story.

The basic plan of a revenge story is as follows: The main character has been grievously wronged by the character of secondary importance. The main character plans to get revenge *through his own efforts alone.*

Whereas, the basic plan of the retributive justice story is as follows: The main character has been grievously wronged by the character of secondary importance. The main character then plans that justice shall be done, partly through his own efforts, but *mainly* because of the character traits of the secondary character. Actually, when reduced to its final analysis, the secondary character *brings his own defeat upon himself.* Both the editor and the reader like this type of story as much as they dislike the revenge motive. Such a story is based on the premise, which we all like to believe, that evil deeds bring their own punishment and, conversely, good deeds bring their own reward. You will see in this story that it is Mai-an's selfishness that brings about her downfall. All that Cham Tai did was to arrange the circumstances, whereupon she followed her natural bent. She was not forced to act as she did—her choice was a free one.*

Main Character: Cham Tai.

Number of Characters: Three.

Story in One Sentence: Cham Tai plans to give his unfaithful wife an opportunity to show her complete selfishness; he succeeds to the point of ridding himself of her and also freeing his friend and co-worker from her wiles.

* An exceptionally fine long short story of the retributive justice type is WAGES OF INNOCENCE, by Leonard L. Leonard, published in *Collier's*, May 6, 1939.

Beginning: The beginning of this story is very long, compared to the story's total length. This was made necessary by the complicated situation and unusual setting, and also by the fact that the main character made a number of moves toward accomplishing his purpose for the story before he declared that purpose and before the reader was aware of it. This was good technique, since it aroused curiosity as to what Cham Tai's plan really was. It was obvious from the first that his trip to the Han graves was part of a larger and more important plan. The Beginning ends with the paragraph, "That cannot be. It is Mai-an who has made this puzzle-knot, and it is she who must unravel it. Your fate, Yuan Kee, I will place in Mai-an's hands. It is she who will decide whether you are to have life—or death!"

At this point every cause, every factor, that will work itself out in the end has been planted.

Body: The Body extends from the paragraph above, up to and including the sentence, "Nothing moved in the drowsy silence of the parched valley save the slowly creeping shadows." At this point everything started in the Beginning has been worked out to the fullest possible extent and to the highest possible point of suspense.

End: The End begins with the sentence, "Finally, as the great brazen wheel touched the rim of the distant mountains, Yuan Kee raised his head and sprang to his feet." From here to where the story actually ends the action is swift, decisive. The story actually ends with these words, "'Aye, I watched her creeping off long since,' Cham Tai announced calmly. 'And mark this—she has taken the water gourd! It seems that Mai-an's choice was to save herself!'" Though the story ends here it is not complete. So the author has added a Sequel, explaining exactly what Cham Tai's plan was and how and why it worked. This technique is often used at the close of stories of Purpose Accomplishment by means of Ingenuity, where some explanation is absolutely necessary, as is the case here. There are also two loose threads to be tied up—the fate of Yuan Kee and Cham Tai's attitude toward him—and also a step is needed in the unification of the story. This last is accomplished by going back to the subject in the forefront at the Beginning, the opening up of the Han tombs. Not until these matters are taken care of is the story completed to the satisfaction of the reader.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. Unusual foreign setting. (Though writers should remember that few stories with foreign settings—and still fewer with both foreign settings and foreign characters—are published.)
2. The story deals with a situation that is universally familiar and well understood; in other words, the triangle. This situation

is stated clearly in the first paragraph, and repeated in the second paragraph. The three main characters are introduced and characterized in the first paragraph. Liking is created for Cham Tai because of his culture and age. He "trusts" Yuan Kee, so the reader is inclined to trust Yuan Kee, too. Mai-an is "wilful," the first implication that she is an unlikable character.

3. The reader is plainly told that Cham Tai has a plan for solving his problem, but that plan is not revealed. This is standard technique for building interest in the Beginning of the Purpose Accomplishment by means of Ingenuity story. It arouses curiosity in the reader, makes him read on to find out what the plan is. It also gives a central and continuing thread of interest for the reader to follow. This information is given the reader in the paragraph that reads as follows: "But they were mistaken. For from what happened afterward, it was evident that Cham Tai was fully aware of the 'puzzle-knot' in his household, and his plans for solving it must have been worked out to the smallest detail before he set out for the Valley of the Hundred Graves."

   One especially noteworthy factor in this story is the way that dislike and disapproval is subtly built for Mai-an, and liking and respect is built for Yuan Kee. The trained analyst, noting these points as he reads, would know long before the story ends that Mai-an is headed for disaster and that Yuan Kee's fate will be a comparatively happy one. Mai-an is shown "pouting" and in fiction no likable character ever pouts. Over and over she feels fear and no reader likes a coward. She lies to Cham Tai about her relationship with Yuan Kee. Therefore when she steals away with the gourd of water the reader accepts the action as logical and believable.

   On the other hand, Yuan Kee tells the truth to Cham Tai. He does not blame Mai-an for what has happened. When taxed with his disloyalty, he flushes with shame, that is, he is sorry for what he has done. He offers to take all punishment even to giving up his own life to save the life of Mai-an. So when, at the end, Cham Tai establishes Yuan Kee in his former relationship of trusted worker, the reader is satisfied, believing that Yuan Kee deserves this kindness.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character, by following an ingenious plan, rids himself of a disloyal associate and retains a loyal friend.

Caged

BY

LLOYD ERIC REEVE

(Published in *Household Magazine*, August 1935. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by the author, Lloyd Eric Reeve.)

Emphatically, Mr. Purcell did not believe in ghosts. Nevertheless, the man who bought the two doves, and his strange act immediately thereafter, left him with a distinct sense of the eerie. As though, behind his departed customer, there had lingered a musty smell of death.

Purcell was a small, fussy man; red cheeks and a tight, melon stomach. Large glasses so magnified his eyes as to give him the appearance of a wise and very genial owl.

He owned and conducted a pet shop. He sold cats and dogs and monkeys; he dealt in fish food and bird seed, prescribed remedies for ailing canaries, and displayed on his shelves long rows of ornate and gilded cages. He considered himself something of a professional man.

A constant stir of movement pervaded his dusky shop—whispered twitters, sly rustling; squeals, cheeps, and sudden squawks. Small feet scampered in frantic circles; frightened, bewildered, blindly seeking. Across the shelves pulsed this endless flicker of life. The place smelled of confined flesh. But the customers who came in said:

"Aren't they cute! Look at that little codger! They're *sweet.*"

And Mr. Purcell himself would smile and briskly rub his hands and emphatically bob his head.

Each morning, when the routine of opening his shop was completed, it was the proprietor's custom to perch on a high stool, behind the counter, unfold his morning paper, and pompously digest the day's news. As he read he would smirk, frown, reflectively purse his lips, knowingly lift his eyebrows, nod in grave agreement. He read everything, even advice to the love-lorn and the minutely detailed columns of want ads.

It was a raw, blustery day. Wind gusted against the high, plate-glass windows. Smoke filmed the wintry city and the air was grey with a pallor of frost. Having completed his usual tasks, Mr. Purcell again mounted the high stool and unfolded his morning paper. He adjusted his glasses,

and glanced, with the unbiased air of a righteous judge, at the day's headlines. Skittering feet, chirping and squeaking and mewing, the soft frantic stir of life, vibrated all around him; yet Mr. Purcell heard no more than he would have heard the monotonous ticking of a familiar clock.

There was a bell over the door that jangled whenever a customer entered. This morning, however, for the first time Mr. Purcell could recall, it failed to ring. Simply he glanced up, and there was the stranger, standing just inside the door, as if he had materialized out of thin air.

The storekeeper slid off his stool. From the first instant he knew instinctively, unreasonably, that the man hated him; but out of habit he rubbed his hands briskly together, smiled and pertly nodded.

"Good morning," he beamed. "What can I do for you?"

The man's shiny shoes squeaked forward. His suit was cheap, ill-fitting, but obviously new. A grey pallor deadened his pinched features. He had a shuttling glance and close-cropped hair. Ignoring Purcell for the moment, he rolled his gaze around the shadowy shop.

"A nasty morning," volunteered the shopkeeper. He clasped both hands across his melon-like stomach, and smiled importantly. "I see by the paper we're in for a cold snap. Now what was it you wanted?"

The man stared closely at Purcell, as though just now aware of his presence. He said, "I want something in a cage."

"Something in a cage?" Mr. Purcell was a bit confused. "You mean—some sort of pet?"

"I mean what I said!" snapped the man. "Something in a cage. Something alive that's in a cage."

"I see," hastened the storekeeper, not at all certain that he did. His eyes narrowed gravely and he pursed his lips. "Now let me think. A white rat, perhaps? I have some very nice white rats."

"God!" said the man. "Not rats. Something with wings. Something that flies."

"A bird!" exclaimed Mr. Purcell.

"A bird's all right." The customer pointed suddenly to a suspended cage which contained two snowy birds. "Doves? How much are those?"

"Five-fifty," came the prompt answer. "And a very reasonable price. They are a fine pair."

"Five-fifty?" The sallow man was obviously crestfallen. He hesitantly produced a five-dollar bill. "I'd like to have those birds. But this is all I got. Just five dollars."

Mentally, Mr. Purcell made a quick calculation, which told him that at a fifty cent reduction he could still reap a tidy profit. He smiled magnanimously. "My dear man, if you want them that badly, you can certainly have them for five dollars."

"I'll take them." He laid his five dollars on the counter.

Mr. Purcell teetered on tiptoe, unhooked the cage, and handed it to

his customer. The man cocked his head to one side, listening to the constant chittering, the rushing scurry of the shop. "That noise!" he blurted. "Doesn't it get you?"

"Noise? What noise?" Mr. Purcell looked surprised. He could hear nothing unusual.

The customer glared. "I mean all this caged stuff. Drives you crazy, doesn't it?"

Purcell drew back. Either the man was insane, or drunk. He said hastily: "Yes, yes. Certainly. I guess so."

"Listen." The staring eyes came closer. "How long d'you think it took me to make that five dollars?"

The merchant wanted to order him out of the shop. But, oddly enough, he couldn't. He heard himself dutifully asking, "Why—why, how long did it take you?"

The other laughed. "Ten years! At hard labor. Ten years to earn five dollars. Fifty cents a year."

It was best, Purcell decided, to humor him. "My, my! Ten years. That's certainly a long time. Now—"

"They give you five dollars," laughed the man, "and a cheap suit, and tell you not to get caught again."

Mr. Purcell mopped his sweating brow. "Now, about the care and feeding of your doves. I would advise—"

"Bah!" The sallow man swung around, and stalked abruptly from the store.

Purcell sighed with sudden relief. He waddled to the window and stared out. Just outside, his peculiar customer had halted. He was holding the cage shoulder-high, staring at his purchase. Then, opening the cage, he reached inside and drew out one of the doves. He tossed it into the air. He drew out the second and tossed it after the first. They rose like wind-blown balls of fluff and were lost in the smoky grey of the wintry city. For an instant the liberator's silent and lifted gaze watched after them. Then he dropped the cage. A futile, suddenly forlorn figure, he shoved both hands deep in his trouser pockets, hunched down his head and shuffled away . . .

The merchant's brow was puckered with perplexity. So desperately had the man desired the doves that he had let him have them at a reduced price. And immediately he had turned them loose. "Now why," Mr. Purcell muttered, "did he do that?" He felt vaguely insulted.

Analysis of "Caged"

Length: Approximately 1000 words.

Plot (or story design): A build-up of emotion toward the main character.

in this case a blend of pity and sympathy. (Though the main character has a purpose, this is not a Purpose Accomplishment story, since there is no obstacle in the way of the purpose accomplishment.)

Theme: It is torture to be caged.

Viewpoint: Omniscient, entering only into the consciousness of Mr. Purcell, a minor character.

Type: Symbolic. The caged doves and their liberation symbolize that portion of the main character's life with which the story deals, his imprisonment and liberation.

Main Character: The unnamed man who buys the doves.

Number of Characters: Two.

Story in One Sentence: A man who has just been released from prison buys two caged doves and sets them free.

Beginning: The Beginning ends with the man's words, "I want something in a cage." The setting has been established, Mr. Purcell characterized and individualized to a high degree, the main character, the unnamed man, introduced and his purpose stated. The rest of the story is concerned with developing these factors to their highest possible emotional and dramatic peaks.

Body: The Body begins with the words, "'Something in a cage?' Mr. Purcell was a bit confused." Further details are then developed that add to the reader's interest in the man and sympathy for him. He is willing to spend the five dollars, for which he has paid such a fearful price, for two doves. The reason for the man's prison term is immaterial to the story, and is not mentioned. Mr. Purcell's lack of comprehension of the man is stressed. The Body ends with the words, "'Bah!' The sallow man swung around, and stalked abruptly from the store." At this point all the causes set forth in the Beginning have been developed to the highest possible point of tension. Something decisive *must* happen.

End: The End begins with the words, "Purcell sighed with sudden relief. He waddled to the window and stared out." Through Mr. Purcell's eyes the reader watches the scene in the street and the action of the main character. The ending ends with the words, "A futile, suddenly forlorn figure, he shoved both hands deep in his trouser pockets, hunched down his head and shuffled away . . ."

Sequel: Though the *story* has actually ended, this short sequel is necessary to complete the story in a way that will leave the reader with a sense of satisfaction. The story began with Mr. Purcell, and so in order to unify it, the story ends with the spotlight on Mr. Purcell. The last sentence stresses a very important, though subtle, phase of the story that has been developed almost from the beginning—the cultivation of a growing feeling in the reader that he is far more intelligent, sensitive and understanding than Mr. Purcell. Readers find this feeling a very pleasant one.

Main Means and Devices Used to Make This Story Interesting:

1. The story is told in an unusual way; that is, the story is told as a minor character sees it, but explanation and information are given from the omniscient viewpoint. Usually, stories presented as a minor character sees them are told in the first person by the minor character. The method used in presenting CAGED has all the advantages of the Minor Character Narrator method of presentation, plus the advantages of the omniscient viewpoint.
2. The method used to get reader interest in the first paragraph. This device is often used by skilled writers when, as is the case with this story, a good deal of wordage is required before the story action starts, to establish setting, atmosphere, characterization, etc. This first paragraph, forty-three words in length, *almost* tells the whole story, but in such a way that *strong curiosity* is aroused in the reader to find out *what really happened and why.* This lures the reader through the thirteen paragraphs of narrative that precede the beginning of the story action, the place where something actually happens. Of course this long narrative passage is written with the greatest technical skill and is nowhere dull and static. It is made up of a fine type of narrative writing, packed with specific detail, sensory appeal and almost countless stimuli to the creative imagination of the reader. Nevertheless, there was danger that the reader would not have followed through, unless stimulated by the curiosity roused in the first paragraph.
3. The minor character, Mr. Purcell, is *highly* characterized and individualized. The reader is interested in him *as a person.*
4. The factor which has been touched on before, that Mr. Purcell is totally unaware of the significance of what is taking place, materially steps up reader interest.

   An unusual feature of this story is that it begins with a minor character and the story proceeds for some time before the main character is introduced. Another unusual feature is that the main character is never given a name. This is an excellent illustration of the axiom that the nature of the story material dictates the treatment. Practically every rule of short story writing may be broken when and if by that means a better effect and greater interest can be built. It is not easy to see how this story could have been better told by using any other method than the one employed by Mr. Reeve.

This Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: A man, through loss of his own freedom, realizes the importance of freedom to every living thing. He translates this conviction into action by giving freedom to something, or someone, who has been deprived of it.

New Home

BY

WILLIAM COLE

(Published in *Cosmopolitan,* March 1940. Reprinted by permission of Willis Kingsley Wing, agent for the author. Copyright, William Cole.)

The Big Trunk lay flat in the driveway. Jimmy sat Bump down on it and pushed his nose into the saucer. He could feel all the pup's bones, and the skinny little body shivered in his hands.

"He won't eat," Jimmy said to Ralph. "He'll get sick; he won't eat."

Ralph was the chauffeur. He was piling Mother's bags into the station wagon. "You better go inside," he said. "Your folks are waiting for you."

Jimmy wiped Bump's nose. "Bump didn't want to come," he said. "He didn't want to leave the box with the other pups. When the man at the kennels took him out, he tried to run back."

"He'll be all right," Ralph said.

Ralph stood the trunk up. The white tag on the handle swung back and forth. The tag had Mother's name on it, and underneath: "RENO, NEVADA."

"Boy!" Jimmy said. "Nevada. That's 'way out West, isn't it?"

"You go inside," Ralph said.

Jimmy moved the saucer in front of Bump. "The man didn't want to sell him at first," he told Ralph. "The man said he was too young yet. But he was the only one I wanted."

Ralph wasn't listening, and Jimmy put the pup down and walked toward the house. A gray bird flew past, and he watched it skim down the lawn all the way to the lake. He wished it would hurry up and get hot. He wanted to take the canoe out with Dad. He laughed when he thought of Mother in the canoe. If it tipped just a little she'd cry right out.

Dad was standing by the window in the library. Mother was sitting on the couch, looking down at her hands. Dad was saying something, but he stopped when Jimmy came in and turned around to the window.

"Jimmy," Mother said. She looked up at him and then back at her hands. "Jimmy, darling, sit over here." She patted the couch. "Your father and I—we have something to—"

Jimmy spun on his heel. He spun hard, but on account of the rug he only went around once.

"Jimmy!" Mother said.

He climbed up on the couch. "Will you get me a cowboy hat when you're out West, Mother?" he asked. "Will you?"

"Yes, dear," Mother said. She tried to kiss him, but he rolled to one side.

"Bump won't eat," he told them.

"Jimmy," Dad said. He twisted the cord on the shade and then watched it twist back. "Jimmy, what would you say if I told you we were going to give up—move away from this house? What would you say if I told you that you were going to live six months—half the time with your mother and then half the time with me? Huh, son?" He bounced the cord on the window. "And what do you say, while your mother's away, we run up to Maine, just the two of us, and get in some fishing?"

"Fishing!" Jimmy yelled. "Maine! Oh, boy!"

"And when I come back," Mother said, "when I come back, Jimmy, we'll—just you and I—we'll go down to the shore."

"What about Dad?" Jimmy asked. "Won't he come too?"

Mother didn't look at him. "No, darling," she said. "Just you and I."

"Why won't Dad come?"

Mother didn't answer. Neither did Dad. The way they didn't say anything made Jimmy feel funny. He remembered the way they used to laugh all the time.

"We—we're not going to live in this house any more?" he said.

Dad came over and sat in a chair. He sat down low, like he did when he came home tired from his office.

"Look, son," he said. "You'll understand this a lot better when you're older, but look. Sometimes things don't pan out; they don't turn out the way we—the way we'd like them to turn out. Sometimes things start off swell, and we think they're going to keep right on being swell. But then something goes wrong; something we didn't see. And then—"

"How do you expect a child of eight to make any sense out of that?" Mother said, "Jimmy, look. You know how your father and I feel about you, don't you?"

Jimmy drew a line on the couch.

"And you know that we wouldn't do anything—anything we could help—to hurt—to make you feel bad, don't you?"

He made the line into a circle.

"Well, then, darling," Mother said, "you must believe—you've got to believe us when we tell you that people—that mothers and fathers don't always go on living together. Most of the time they do, but sometimes—" Mother's voice got so low he could hardly hear her— "sometimes—"

"Something happens," Dad said.

"Something you—you can't help," Mother said.

Then they stopped talking and just sat there. Jimmy sat looking at them. All of a sudden, he wasn't able to swallow.

"You mean," he said, "you mean that—" He wanted to ask them something, but he didn't know how to say it. He looked away; looked up at a picture of the three of them on the wall.

"You'll understand when you're older," Dad said.

They looked so funny in that picture. They were all tangled up in the snow. Dad had said he was going to teach them to ski and that they should do just what he did. And then, the first thing, Dad was out flat in the snow. So Mother and he fell right on top of him. And they were all laughing so hard they couldn't get up.

"It's for the best, dear," Mother said.

Jimmy kept his eyes on the picture.

"Our trip to Mount Kono," he said, "aren't—won't we go there next winter?"

He waited for them to answer. Then he got up slowly from the couch. His throat felt dry like he'd been running, and it was hard for him to talk.

"But why?" He turned from one of them to the other. "Mother—Dad —*why?*"

"Because," Dad said. He pushed himself up hard, like he was angry. "Because people won't—people can't—" He waved his hand around. "Because . . ." He shook his head at Mother.

Jimmy nearly got past her, but Mother caught him.

"Jimmy!" she said. "Jimmy, darling!" He could feel her face quiver against his. "Don't look that way. Please, please don't! You won't mind so much later. Then you'll understand, Jimmy; then—then, maybe, you'll forgive us." She pressed him tight, and her cheek tasted salty. "It'll be all right, darling; it'll be all right, I promise you, when you're older."

The station wagon was just driving away when he got outside. He could see the dust, but he couldn't see the car very well. He could see the lake as he crossed the lawn, and the woods on the other side of it where they used to go Sundays on picnics, but something seemed to swim up in front of him and he couldn't see them so well, either.

He found Bump around in the back. The pup shivered again when he touched him. "What is it, Bump?" he whispered. "What's the matter, boy?"

He went into the kitchen to get Bump some milk. There were some fresh strawberry cakes on the table, his favorites, but he didn't want any. Bump didn't want the milk.

He gathered the pup up and started walking. "It's all right, boy," he kept whispering. "It—it's all right."

His throat hurt him even worse, now, but it wasn't a long walk. He rubbed the pup's neck. The man at the kennels had been right. Bump was too young yet. He was too young to have a new home. He would be much better off in his old one for a while. A lot happier. Later on, the man could give Bump back to him. After a while, when he was older.

Analysis of "New Home"

Length: Approximately 1300 words.

Plot (or story design): This is primarily a theme story. The story of the puppy constitutes a sub-plot that parallels Jimmy's story except that in the puppy's case, the ending is a happy one.

Theme: Young children should have the protection and security of a stable home.

Viewpoint: Jimmy, third person.

Type: Dramatic incident. This is an incident, because at the End the relationship of the three main characters is the same as it was at the Beginning. The only difference is that in the Beginning Jimmy did not realize what the situation was, but at the End he does. In the sub-plot, the situation *does* change. Jimmy takes the puppy back to its home.

Main Character: Jimmy.

Number of Characters: Five. Major characters—Jimmy, Dad, Mother, and Bump. Background character—Ralph.

Story in One Sentence: Jimmy, reaching the realization that he no longer has a home, understands the feelings of his puppy and takes him back to his mother and the familiar box which is the puppy's home.

Beginning: The story is almost all Beginning, because it is very nearly all situation. Therefore there is little progressive action working from cause to effect. Practically all the progressive action that takes place is concerned with Jimmy and Bump. The Beginning ends with the words, " 'It'll be all right, darling; it'll be all right, I promise you, when you're older.' " Not until this point is the situation fully established.

Body: The Body begins with, "The station wagon was just driving away when he got outside." The Body ends with the words, "Bump didn't want the milk." At this point Jimmy makes up his mind what he must do.

End: The End begins with the words, "He gathered the pup up and started walking." The story ends with a long plot step that sums up the gist of the story. By implication, Jimmy's situation and the pup's situation are shown to be similar.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. Use of a familiar situation—a home broken by divorce and its adverse effect on a child.
2. A theme with which practically every reader will agree.
3. Unifying forces.
   a. Repetition of the phrase, "when you're older." This is used twice by Dad, once by Mother and once by Jimmy.

b. The story of Bump.

5. *All* the characters are likable. Look carefully for the specific ways by which the writer accomplishes this difficult feat.
6. The restraint with which the highly emotional situation is presented. There is no over-writing, no sentimentalism.
7. The use of the Objective Viewpoint in some of the highly emotional scenes. For example, one fairly long scene is written entirely from the Objective Viewpoint. It begins with the words, "Jimmy moved the saucer in front of Bump." and ends with the words, " 'Why won't Dad come?' " Here, *only what happens* is presented to the reader. There is no evaluation, no comment, no thoughts or feelings are *told; only shown.* The reader is left to draw his own conclusions and react emotionally just as if he were witnessing the scene, instead of being told about it.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: A child is shocked and unhappy because his parents are about to be divorced. His own trouble brings understanding of another's trouble and a determination to help that other person, or animal.

Women Must Wait

BY

HUGH CAVE

(Published in *This Week*, October 20, 1946. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by Hugh Cave, the author.)

By midnight the storm was nearing its peak of fury, and even above the thunderous roar of the rain Sally MacAndrews could hear the sea exploding on the pier a hundred yards from the house.

It terrified her—always would! If I live seventy years more and get to be ninety, she thought, I'll never be calm and brave like the wives of other Storm Point fishermen.

She stopped the rattling of the front-room window with a wedge of newspaper and stepped back, biting her lip. A moment ago the window's thumping had startled her into running from the kitchen to the front door. She had even opened the door and called into the wind, "Editha, is that you?", forgetting that when her neighbor, Editha Edmonds, came from her father's house at the end of the road, she never bothered to knock any more but walked right in. Even when Eric was home Editha did that. As if she knew, in her heart, that Eric was glad to welcome a woman who would not annoy him with small fears and imaginings.

It's easy for her, Sally thought. She was brought up here on the Point. She never had to learn to be brave.

She kept her eyes from the kitchen clock as she set the table for the meal Eric would want when he came in. "I'll be home Tuesday dawn," he'd said, "hungry as a farm horse, and tired enough to sleep the day through."

But the storm would make a difference. The hands of the clock would crawl past the hour as they always did, and her heart would die inside her a dozen times before he came striding at last up the beach.

Now stop it! she told herself angrily. He's always come back and always will! There's sweepin' to do. And his pants to patch, where he snagged them with the cod hook.

She hadn't known, when she married Eric MacAndrews, that the sea would be everlastingly scheming to take him from her, or that a rising wind in the night—like this one, moaning like a hungry beast through the huddled houses of the fishing colony—would fill her with dread. Eric

may have warned her, but she hadn't listened. It had been enough to know that he wanted her.

Only once, though, had she fled from the terror of being alone with her dread. That night of her first real storm, she'd stumbled through the dark to a neighbor's house, on the pretext of needing kerosene. Vivid even now was her memory of gray-haired Mrs. Whaley, a fisherman's wife for forty years, rocking and knitting in the corner by the window while the wind clawed at the ancient roof over her head.

"Sit down, child, and stop your fretting. Fishin' women need to know how to wait."

How right that was! Storm Point women were always waiting, and there were nights when a wife's heart suffocated with the fear that when the men returned, her man would not be among them. Sally had seen it happen. Only last month she'd seen the mute anguish of Pete Hyatt's wife, Cynthia, when Pete's partner came to her door with the news.

But that night at Mrs. Whaley's she'd not known so much, and watching the slow, maddening movement of the knitting needles, had cried out in desperation, "Dear God, isn't there something we can *do?*"

"We can wait and not be scared. They've terrors enough to face, without knowing a wife's fears await them at home."

"But waiting isn't enough! Can't we at least—pray?"

"We can pray."

"But you sit there knitting, knitting . . ."

The needles were still a moment. "Child," Mrs. Whaley said, "a woman's hands don't need to idle just because her heart's busy. I think the Lord will forgive me for makin' my man a sweater on His time."

Never again had Sally fled from her house. Not even the night, three months later, when part of a neighbor's roof, soaring on the wind, had shattered her kitchen window. But they knew she'd never learned to sit and wait as they waited. Oh, they knew! Else why, whenever the sea and sky turned angry, did Editha Edmonds come from the house at the end of the road to sit with her?

Eric knew too. How could he help but know, with Editha sitting there every time he returned after a night of wildness?

He could have married Editha, Sally thought suddenly. She's prettier than I am, and only a year older. Perhaps he should have married her. Perhaps that's what the other women are saying . . .

It was no new thought. For weeks now she had been aware of Eric's attitude toward old Matthew Edmonds' daughter. A kind of tenderness in the way he spoke to her. A gentleness. Editha was all Matt Edmonds had, of course, since his wife died; but the old man wouldn't live forever . . .

Sally put aside her sewing, went to the front-room window and peered out, trying to see up the road. It's not like Editha to be so late, she thought. But the rain ran down the glass in a torrent. The road was dim

in the windy dark. Above the wind's screaming, the thunder of the waves was more ominous than ever. "Dear God, keep him from harm," she whispered. "No matter what he thinks of me, keep him safe."

She finished his trousers and laid them over the bed in the back room. Mixed eggs and milk in a bowl, and placed strips of bacon in the cold frying pan on the oil stove. Measured coffee into the pot. These small tasks kept her busy, but did not for an instant lessen her awareness of the wind's howling. Presently it occurred to her, without sense of shock, that this was the worst of all the storms she'd lived through.

Editha wasn't coming. No one could walk the road tonight.

Sitting at the kitchen table, in the unsteady light of a kerosene lamp, she heard a torn section of roof flapping, and a ripping sound as it was snatched away by the wind. Something made of metal—a refuse can, probably—clattered against the back steps and was gone. The house shook. The table trembled. The lamp on the table executed a solemn little march, like a child's toy wound with a key. She thought of what the sea would be like out on the banks, where mountainous waves would be toying in wild revelry with the small fishing boats.

I'm scared, she thought. I can't help it.

She went to the bedroom and looked in the mirror above the dressing table—the mahogany table which had once been part of a cabin cruiser wrecked on the beach. Her face was white, her eyes circled. Nothing could be done to erase those indelible imprints of fear. They would be there for all to see, long after the storm had passed.

In the front room she sat down to wait, hands clenched in her lap. The room turned gray. Dawn came, still violent with storm.

Then she heard footsteps, and the door clattered open, and shut. She stood up, too tired to find words for the cry of relief in her heart. She could only speak his name, and that in a whisper. But after a step toward him, she stopped in confusion.

Eric had glanced at her only long enough to see—if he were looking for it—the imprint of the night's terror on her tired face. Abruptly he looked away. His gaze swept the room. His voice was edged: "Where is she? Where's Editha?"

"She—she didn't come tonight, Eric."

He muttered something that was lost in the shriek of the wind, flung the door open and was gone.

"Eric! Eric . . . !"

Bareheaded, in slippers and house dress, Sally raced after him; but his long stride had carried him to the road so swiftly that she could not overtake him. She sobbed his name as she stumbled against the wind—"Eric, wait! Eric . . . !"—and the wind mocked her with the voice of Mrs. Whaley: "They've terrors enough to face without knowing a wife's fears await them at home."

He reached the house at the road's end before her and was inside, with

the door shut, when she arrived. She knew she should not open the door. More than that was closed to her now. But she opened it.

He stood with his back to her, facing a figure on the couch. The room was dark. Drawn shades held out the light, and when Sally closed the door behind her the wind's roaring was muffled too. On the couch, her face in a drenched pillow, Editha was sobbing.

Eric stood over her. "Editha." He put out a hand to touch her and drew it back again. "Editha, listen." Then, retreating a step, he whispered, "Sally, you tell her. Matt—her father—was swept overboard tonight. We never found him." He caught her hand, pleading with her. "*You* tell her. She's always looked to you for comfort when she was scared like this."

It took a while for Sally to understand. The words had to find their way through a muddled mind to her heart. "She's always looked to you for comfort!" What did he mean?

"She—she's always looked to *me*, Eric?"

He was impatient. "Of course, she has! Every night the wind even whispered off key, she'd sit with you. Go on, Sally. Weeping women scare me."

Sally moved slowly, through the mist of her understanding. It was incredible but true. The girl on the couch *was* terrified—sobbing her heart out because, this time, she had been trapped here alone by the quickness of the storm's coming and forced to sit through it with only herself for company. Compassion melted the anguish from Sally's face as she knelt beside the couch. "It's all right, Editha," she said softly. "It's Sally. Don't be afraid . . ."

Later, when the storm had spent itself and Mrs. Whaley had been called in, Sally and Eric walked home. Over a beach littered with seaweed and debris they walked in silence, until Sally at last spoke the question in her heart. Before she would know peace the question had to be answered—not by Mrs. Whaley or the women of Storm Point, but by Eric: "Is it so terrible, Eric, for a woman to be afraid on such a night? Is it?"

"Why?" he said.

"*I've* been afraid. Always."

He caught her hand and held it. "You're afraid for me," he said easily, "and that's as it should be. Editha now—she's scared for herself. There's a world of difference."

Sally knew what he meant, even before he stopped on the storm-swept beach and gathered her into his arms.

Analysis of "Women Must Wait"

Length: Approximately 1500 words.

Plot (or story design): Misunderstanding, Discovery and Reversal.

Theme: There is selfish fear . . . fear for one's self, and the unselfish fear . . . fear for another.

Viewpoint: Main character, third person.

Type: Chronological.

Main Character: Sally MacAndrews.

Number of Characters: Four. Major characters—Sally, Eric, Editha. Minor character—Mrs. Whaley.

Story in One Sentence: Sally believes she is a base, cowardly person and that her husband is in love with Editha, whom Sally considers brave, but she discovers she is mistaken and reverses her beliefs.

Beginning: The Beginning ends with the words, " 'No matter what he thinks of me, keep him safe.' "

Body: The Body begins with the next sentence, "She finished his trousers and laid them over the bed in the back room." It ends with Sally's question, " 'Is it so terrible, Eric, for a woman to be afraid on such a night?' "

End: The End moves swiftly, beginning with the words, " 'Why?' he said." Sally's discovery comes with Eric's words, " 'You're afraid for me,' he said easily, 'and that's as it should be. Editha now—she's scared for herself. There's a world of difference.' " Sally's complete reversal of thought is indicated by five words, "Sally knew what he meant . . ." The story ends satisfactorily with Eric *showing* his love for Sally by taking her in his arms.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The story opens with one character alone. For the greater part of the story, the main character is alone. This is a difficult situation to make and keep interesting but the author has succeeded in doing so. One device he used is the dramatic and menacing background of the storm. The long stretches of narrative are so skillfully written that reader interest does not sag.
2. The situation is of *great importance* to the main character. She fears that her husband, whom she loves devotedly, will lose his life in the storm. She believes he is in love with Editha. Either of these situations is sufficiently important to carry a fifteen-hundred word story; together they double the menace and the drama.
3. The excellent characterization of Sally, both by her thoughts and her actions. All her thoughts are for the safety of Eric, her actions are for his comfort when and if he returns safely. These are plants also, preparing the reader for the end, where Eric tells her she is afraid, not for herself, but for him.
4. The storm is also used as a strong unifying force.

The Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: A person misunderstands his own character and incorrectly evaluates the feeling of another character toward him, but discovers the truth suddenly and dramatically.

Later

BY

MICHAEL FOSTER

(Published in *Cosmopolitan*, November 1938. Reprinted in condensed form in *Reader's Digest*. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by Ann Watkins, Inc., agent for Michael Foster.)

It's queer, the things you remember. When life has crumbled suddenly, and left you standing there, alone. It's not the big important things that you remember when you come to that: not the plans of years, not the love nor the hopes you've worked so hard for. It's the little things that you remember then: the little things you hadn't noticed at the time. The way a hand touched yours, and you too busy to notice; the hopeful little inflection of a voice you didn't really bother to listen to . . .

John Carmody found that out, staring through the living-room window at the cheerful Tuesday-afternoon life of the street. He kept trying to think about the big, important things, lost now—the years and the plans, and the hopes. And the love. But he couldn't quite get them focused sharply in his mind, just now. Not this afternoon.

They, those important things, were like a huge but nebulous background in his mind. All he could remember, now, was a queer little thing: nothing, really, if you stopped and thought about it in the light of the years and the plans and the—the great love. It was only something his little girl had said to him. One evening, two—perhaps three weeks ago. Nothing, if you looked at it rationally. The sort of thing that kids are always saying.

But it was what he was remembering, now.

That particular night, he had brought home from the office a finished draft of the annual stockholders' report. Very important, it was. Things being as they were, it meant a great deal—to his future; to the future of his wife and his little girl. He sat down to re-read it before dinner. It had to be right: it meant so much.

And just as he turned a page, Marge, his little girl, came with a book under her arm. It was a green-covered book, with a fairy-tale picture pasted on it. And she said: "Look, Daddy."

He glanced up and said: "Oh, fine. A new book, eh?"

"Yes, Daddy," she said. "Will you read me a story in it?"

"No, dear. Not just now," he said.

Marge just stood there, and he read through a paragraph which told the stockholders about certain replacements in the machinery of the factory. And Marge's voice, with timid and hopeful little inflections, was saying:

"But Mummy said you probably would, Daddy."

He looked up over the top of the type-script. "I'm sorry," he answered. "Maybe Mummy will read it to you. I'm busy, Dear."

"No," Marge said politely. "Mummy is much busier, upstairs. Won't you read me just this one story? Look—it has a picture. See? Isn't it a *lovely* picture, Daddy?"

"Oh, yes. Beautiful," he said. "Now, that picture has class, hasn't it? But I do have to work tonight. Some other time . . ."

After that, there was quite a long silence. Marge just stood there, with the book open at the lovely picture. It was a long time before she said anything else. He read through two more pages explaining in full detail, as he had directed, the shift in markets over the past twelve months, the plans outlined by the sales department for meeting these problems which after all, could safely be ascribed to local conditions, and the advertising program which after weeks of conferences had been devised to stabilize and even increase the demand for their products.

"But it *is* a lovely picture, Daddy. And the story looks *so* exciting," Marge said.

"I know," he said. "Ah . . . Mmmmm. Some other time. Run along, now."

"I'm sure you'd enjoy it, Daddy," Marge said.

"Eh? Yes, I know I would. But later."

"Oh," Marge said. "Well, some other time, then. Will you, Daddy? Some other time?"

"Oh, of course," he said. "You bet."

But she didn't go away. She still stood there quietly, like a good child. And after a long time, she put the book down on the stool at his feet, and said:

"Well, whenever you get ready, just read it to yourself. Only read it loud enough so I can hear, too."

"Sure," he said. "Sure. Later."

And that was what John Carmody was remembering. Now. Not the long plans of love and care for the years ahead. He was remembering the way a well-mannered child had touched his hand with timid little fingers, and said:

"Just read it to yourself. Only read it loud enough so I can hear, too."

And that was why, now, he put his hand on the book. From the corner table where they had piled some of Marge's playthings, picking them up from the floor where she had left them.

The book wasn't new any more; and the green cover was dented and thumbed. He opened it to the *lovely* picture.

And reading that story, his lips moving stiffly with anguish to form the words, he didn't try to think any more, as he should be thinking, about the important things: about his careful and shrewd and loving plans for the years to come; and for a little while he forgot, even, the horror and bitterness of his hate for the half-drunken punk kid who had careened down the street in a secondhand car—and who was now in jail on manslaughter charges.

He didn't even see his wife, white and silent, dressed for Marge's funeral, standing in the doorway, trying to make her voice say calmly: "I'm ready, dear. We must go."

Because John Carmody was reading:

"Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived in a woodcutter's hut, in the Black Forest. And she was so fair that the birds forgot their singing from the bough, looking at her. And there came a day when . . ."

He was reading it to himself. But loud enough for her to hear, too. Maybe.

Analysis of "Later"

Length: Approximately 1000 words.

Plot (or story design): A build-up of emotion toward the main character, in this case the emotion being a blend of pity and sympathy.

Theme: It is the little things of life that count.

Viewpoint: Omniscient.

Type: Flashback.

Main Character: John Carmody.

Number of Characters: Three.

Story in One Sentence: John Carmody feels he is too busy to read a story to his little girl, and bitterly regrets his action after her death.

Beginning: The Beginning ends with the words, " 'No, dear. Not just now,' he said." In this Beginning John Carmody and Marge have been introduced in person and Mummy has been introduced by being mentioned. Mummy, it should be noted, is very minor; in fact, a background character. The Beginning extends into the flashback, as you see, where the situation is fully established.

Body: The Body begins with, "Marge just stood there," and ends shortly after the close of the flashback with the remembered words, " 'just read it to yourself. Only read it loud enough so I can hear it, too.' " At this point everything in the Beginning and Body has been worked out to the highest point of emotional tension. Though there has been no statement to that effect, the reader knows that Marge is

dead. Now John Carmody proceeds to the only action possible to him.

End: The End begins with the words, "And that was why, now, he put his hand on the book." There is no Sequel necessary. The story ends with the paragraph beginning, "He was reading it to himself." In the final word, "Maybe," is summed up the futility, regret and remorse that John Carmody is feeling.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The opening paragraphs *that hint at, but do not reveal* the tragic facts of the situation. This arouses strong curiosity strengthened by an emotional response of sympathy for John Carmody. This sympathy is retained unimpaired because Carmody's *motive* was intrinsically admirable. This motive was to provide more amply for Marge's future.
2. The introduction of a lovable child. Note the exact words and phrases that build liking for Marge.
3. The use of the flashback format. This shortens and unifies the actual time lapse of the story which is, disregarding the flashback, less than ten minutes.
4. The amplified statement of the theme in the first paragraph that tells the reader what the story is about and gives him a central thread of story interest to follow.
5. Basing the story on a universally familiar experience. Almost every adult has lost a loved one by death and has blamed himself for having failed at some time in his relationship with that person. The basic situation, therefore, does not have to be explained nor built up synthetically. Almost without exception, readers will understand it, because *in some form they will have lived it themselves.*
6. The restrained style and handling of this highly emotional situation that could easily have become maudlin and sentimental.
7. The skillful handling of the flashback format. In the opening paragraphs reader-curiosity is strongly built as to *what happened* before the story opens. The transition to three weeks before is a smooth one. The word "had" is used only once. After that the action in this distant past is presented as if it were taking place before the eyes of the reader. At the end of the flashback the reader is brought back into the progressive movement of the story at the same place where he was taken out of it . . . with John Carmody still remembering.

This Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: The main character fails to show his love by action toward the secondary character and bitterly regrets this failure when it becomes forever impossible to translate his love for this character into any happiness-giving action whatever.

Found Money

BY

JOHN REID BYERS

(Published in *Collier's,* June 1, 1940. Permission to reprint this story has been granted by The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, Copyright 1940 and by Brandt & Brandt, agent for the author, John Reid Byers.)

Still kneeling at the foot of the big cedar, young Jake Kirby finished the count. "Nine hundred 'n' twenty dollars!" he whispered raptly at last.

Jake knew what money it was. Three years ago, when the Derwenter boys had held up the Pine Ridge bank they had been captured in less than twenty-four hours, but not all the stolen money had been recovered. Everybody knew that it was hidden somewhere; many people had searched for it vainly at the time. And today, out after wood pigeons with his old shotgun, Jake had noticed a faint depression at the foot of a tall cedar, and had dug up the fruit jar that held the Derwenters' cache.

The thought of returning the money—forty-six soggy twenty-dollar bills—to the Pine Ridge bank no more occurred to Jake than it would have to nine out of ten of the other searchers. It was found money. It was *his*. His soft brown eyes were very bright as he began to catalogue the things he would buy . . .

It was not for several blissful minutes that he realized that he dared not buy anything. Almost any other finder could have used the money a little at a time without arousing suspicion. But if Jake Kirby walked into a store with a twenty-dollar bill people would ask questions. People he dared not lie to, some of them—people like the town marshal and tall, dour Sheriff Tucker.

Then another thought came. "If a man was workin'—workin' steady, I mean—folks wouldn't notice what money he was spendin'," he told himself. From that thought too he shrank away. Occasionally, if the need for food or tobacco or ammunition was urgent, Jake worked for wages. But never for more than a few days, never without hating it as a wild thing hates a cage. Not even what Emmy Blanton had said that night at the dance could touch or weaken that inborn hate; and Emmy's words had cut deep at the time.

"Maybe I could come by to see you one o' these ev'nin's, Emmy?" he had ventured shyly. The girl had stiffened. "Why, Pa wouldn't let you

on the place, Jake!" she had said proudly. "He wouldn't let any man come seein' me that didn't work!" Jake had turned away dumbly.

Crouching over the hole at the foot of the cedar, he re-buried the Derwenter loot. Then he stood up. "I reckon I could make out to stand it for a year," he muttered doubtfully. "An' there don't seem no other way."

There was a job open on the log pond at the mill. Jake traded his shotgun for a worn pair of spiked boots and went to work. He discovered that it was not as bad as other jobs had been. He even found himself feeling a certain pride in his strength, his sure-footedness on the rolling logs, his skill with the long pike-pole. Out of his first month's pay he bought a new shotgun to take into the woods on Sundays. But after that he spent as little as possible, so that later on, when he began to buy things, no one would be likely to notice that he was spending more than he could have saved.

He had been working for five months when the head pondman quit. The mill superintendent offered Jake the job. Jake told himself that he took it for the extra dollar a day it paid; but the strange, puzzling pride he found himself feeling did not seem to be connected with his raise in pay. And then one Saturday evening he met Emmy Blanton on the street. And Emmy stopped and smiled at him. "I—I just wanted to tell you I thought it was fine, you doin' so good at the mill, Jake," she said quickly. "Everybody's talkin' about it." She had looked down then, coloring a little. "And if—if you still happened to feel like comin' out some night I don't reckon Pa would mind one bit."

Jake went to the Blanton farm the next night, and a great many nights after that. And three months later he and Emmy had moved into one of the company houses down behind the mill. A foreman's house it was, with plumbing; furnished with things that Emmy had picked out of a mail-order catalogue. They had cost Jake nearly all that he had saved, but he was much too happy to care. Anyway, there was still the fruit jar at the foot of the big cedar. Soon now he could begin to use that money.

And then one Sunday morning Jake rose from his breakfast to discover that his tobacco can was empty. He walked to the drugstore to find the little druggist brimming with news. "Remember the Derwenter boys, Jake?" he asked. "Well, they're loose again! Clubbed a guard to death an' got clean over the wall sometime last night! Sheriff's been out since daybreak, case they headed this way . . . Hey, Jake! Don't you want your change?"

Jake forced himself to go back for his change; tried desperately to keep his face expressionless. Because the Derwenter boys would make for their hidden money before anything else. That tall cedar was ten miles from town, perhaps forty from the state prison. Could he still get there first?

"Emmy, I been honin' for some wild meat," he said at the kitchen door five minutes later. "I'm thinkin' of takin' a little walk in the woods, if you don't mind. Likely I could get a few pigeons."

His voice was a little strained, but Emmy was busy with the dishes. "A pigeon stew would be mighty tasty, Jake," she agreed.

Jake's lean body was dripping with sweat, his breath coming with harsh, biting gasps as he reached the great cedar. He had never before traveled so fast so far. And he was too late. There was nothing but an empty hole at the foot of the cedar now.

His first emotion was one of sick, bitter disappointment. But then, as the sobbing pain in his lungs lessened and his aching legs grew steadier under him, a new feeling crept into his mind. A feeling of vague, increasingly pleasant relief. The money might have made trouble for him some day. Now it never could. And he didn't need it. He had all he needed already—his woman, his home, his job. Then came a startling fresh thought. "Why, I never *did* need it!" he told himself in an incredulous whisper.

His breathing was even and unlabored again now, and the ache had left his legs. For the first time he looked away from the hole and scanned the ground around him. The Derwenter boys' trail was easy to see, and not more than an hour or two old. Jake eyed it thoughtfully. A year ago he would not have dreamed of hindering them in their flight. But it was different now. Jake Kirby had a home and a wife now; some day he would have children. He had credit at the stores; next year he would have taxes to pay. Why, he had even voted at the last election! The Derwenter boys were outlaws. He thought suddenly of the murdered prison guard. His fingers tightened slowly around the barrel of the new shotgun. "It looks like it's up to somebody to catch 'em 'fore they do more meanness," he told himself somberly.

Tall Sheriff Tucker got wearily back into his car. "Might as well go home, Pete," he told the deputy at the wheel. "I guess they've headed for the river after all."

They had driven for ten miles along the lonely back-country road when Pete stiffened. "What's that ahead?" he asked sharply.

It was two tired, grim-faced men in prison gray, walking heavily in front of a tall young man with a shotgun. The sheriff's car leaped forward, ground to a stop beside the little group. The deputy scrambled out. Handcuffs clicked on the dirty wrists of the Derwenter boys. Jake Kirby lowered his gun. "I was out hunting, Sheriff," he explained. "But when I cut their trail I knew what it was, an' I figgered I better follow on it." Jake had never thought that the day would come when he would dare to stand eye to eye with Sheriff Tucker, talking to him as to an equal. But today he was doing it. "They'd dug up their money somewhere. They been tryin' to buy me off with it." Then Jake's young

eyes darkened with the worry of a new thought. "I—I hope Emmy ain't countin' on them wood pigeons for supper," he breathed.

The sheriff laughed. "I don't think she'll mind it if she was, Jake. I never heard of any mess of pigeons worth a thousand dollars. The governor put five hundred apiece on these fellows when the guard died. Talk about finding money in the woods!"

Analysis of "Found Money"

Length: Approximately 1400 words.

Plot (or story design): Misunderstanding, Discovery and Reversal, with a weak sub-plot of Wish Fulfillment.

Theme: Wealth that is earned by honest work brings deeper satisfaction than wealth acquired dishonestly.

Viewpoint: Omniscient. Information, explanation and evaluation are given from this viewpoint and two people's viewpoints are used, those of Jake Kirby and Sheriff Tucker.

Type: A story of character growth and character change. This is a rare type, even in the category of Misunderstanding, Discovery and Reversal. It is not often that such drastic character change is shown in a story, even a long short, as is portrayed in FOUND MONEY.

Main Character (Actor A): Jake Kirby.

Number of Characters: Seven. The major characters, however, are only four in number. They are Jake, Emmy, the two Derwenter boys (they function as *one* character and so are counted as one person) and Sheriff Tucker. The three background characters are the mill superintendent, the druggist and Pete.

Story in One Sentence: Jake Kirby finds buried money and reluctantly goes to work so he can spend it without arousing suspicion, but discovers that money honestly acquired brings more satisfaction than money acquired in an intrinsically dishonest way.

Beginning: The Beginning extends up to and including Paragraph 7, ending with the words, "'An' there don't seem no other way.'" At this point all the characters who affect the plot have been either introduced in person or by being mentioned, and all the factors that are developed in the Body, End, and Sequel have been established.

Body: The Body begins with the words, "There was a job open on the log pond at the mill." and ends with, "His first emotion was one of sick, bitter disappointment." This is the Black Moment of the story, where he seems as far as possible from the realization that the money he found is not necessary to him at all.

End: The End begins with the next sentence, "But then . . . a new

feeling crept into his mind." Up to this point, with the exception of a few plants, he has held to the Misunderstanding. Now comes the Discovery part of the story, increasing in sharpness and clarity until he thinks, " 'Why, I never *did* need it!' " This is followed quickly by the Reversal, beginning with "But it was different now." and ending with the sentence, " 'It looks like it's up to somebody to catch 'em 'fore they do more meanness,' he told himself somberly."

This is the end of the Misunderstanding, Discovery and Reversal story, but the story is not yet complete in a way that leaves the reader with a sense of satisfaction. A Sequel is needed.

Sequel: Jake's words given directly above are a declaration of a Purpose, and he achieves this purpose by means of Courage before the end of the story. The Sequel, however, actually begins with the words, "Tall Sheriff Tucker got wearily back in his car." Here, for a few paragraphs, the viewpoint shifts to the sheriff. The story is completed when Jake says, " 'They been tryin' to buy me off with it.' " And the story would have been much stronger had it ended there. From this point to the last word of the story a wish fulfillment factor is injected that is anti-climactic and therefore weakens the story. The fact that a thousand-dollar reward has been offered for the capture of the criminals, and that Jake will get this, is too trite, too pat, too "contrived" and too coincidental to be acceptable or convincing.

Main Means and Devices by Which This Story Is Made Interesting:

1. The universally intriguing situation of finding money.
2. Building in the reader liking for Jake, in spite of the fact that he embarks on an intrinsically dishonest course of action. This is done subtly and surely by characterization and the proper choice of words. He was justified by the fact that he did what nine out of ten other searchers would have done, the implication being that the reader would probably have acted just as Jake did. He does not think he has done anything wrong, but thinks of the money as *his*. He doesn't dislike work . . . only a steady job. Notice the writer's choice of words here . . . ". . . hating it (a job) as a wild thing hates a cage." The reader's sympathy is all with any wild thing that hates a cage. Jake has "soft brown eyes." His remark to Emmy was "ventured shyly." All these are subtle touches that imperceptibly but surely build liking and sympathy for Jake in the mind of the reader.
3. The many ways in which the story is unified. The most important of these ways are as follows:
   a. The use of the title in the story itself.
   b. Opening the story with Jake hunting wood pigeons with a shotgun, and him at the foot of the big cedar, and closing the story in the same setting and with the same action.

This Story Reduced to Its Basic Essentials: Actor A comes into the possession of property not rightfully his. He plans to keep it, but voluntarily gives it up when he realizes that wealth honestly acquired and indisputably his own will bring him a far greater measure of satisfaction.

Sample Page of Radio Script

Miss Elaine Harvard
233 E. Mason Street
Hanley
Pa.

MOON RISING

by

Elaine Harvard

MUSIC: (ESTABLISH THEME, FADE BG, HOLD)

SOUND: (DOOR BELL, FEMININE FOOTSTEPS, DOOR OPEN)

SUSIE: Oh...Jim! What...why...

JIM: Now, look here, Susie...If you think for one minute your Uncle Frederick is going to scare me away from you with his big talk, you're very much mistaken. I'm coming in--

MUSIC: (CUT)

SUSIE: You are not coming in! Go away--

SOUND: (SLIGHT SCUFFLE, DOOR CLOSING)

JIM: You listen to me, Susie Ransome! We love each other and...

SUSIE: I do NOT love you! How dare you say so, after Uncle Frederick and I told you I wouldn't marry you--

JIM: You mean after Uncle Frederick told me. You didn't say a word...remember? That's why I'm back. This morning, with that meddling old goat out of the house, you're going to listen to me.

SUSIE: Don't you talk that way about Uncle--

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MAREN ELWOOD

MAREN ELWOOD is a professional writing coach, critic, and agent, whose background includes experience in both teaching and writing. She has a long record of outstanding success in guiding her pupils to sales in every field of free-lance writing. She is a broadcaster, writer. and public speaker in her own right, and also markets manuscripts, edits books, and gives individual manuscript criticism For many years Miss Elwood lectured on creative writing in the extension division of the University of California, commuting by air from their campus at Berkeley to their classes in Los Angeles. Of the 1500 students with whom she works each year, a large proportion have achieved early and conspicuous success, having been published by the leading book publishing houses and the highest-paying magazines.

Miss Elwood is the author of the famous CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY, considered by leading editors and authors one of the best books ever written on the subject of characterization, the cornerstone of all good writing. CHARACTERS MAKE YOUR STORY is used as a text in colleges and universities throughout the country.

From her new modern building in Hollywood, Miss Elwood conducts classes in all phases of writing — large-scale, successful correspondence courses — as well as diversified activities as a writer and critic.

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